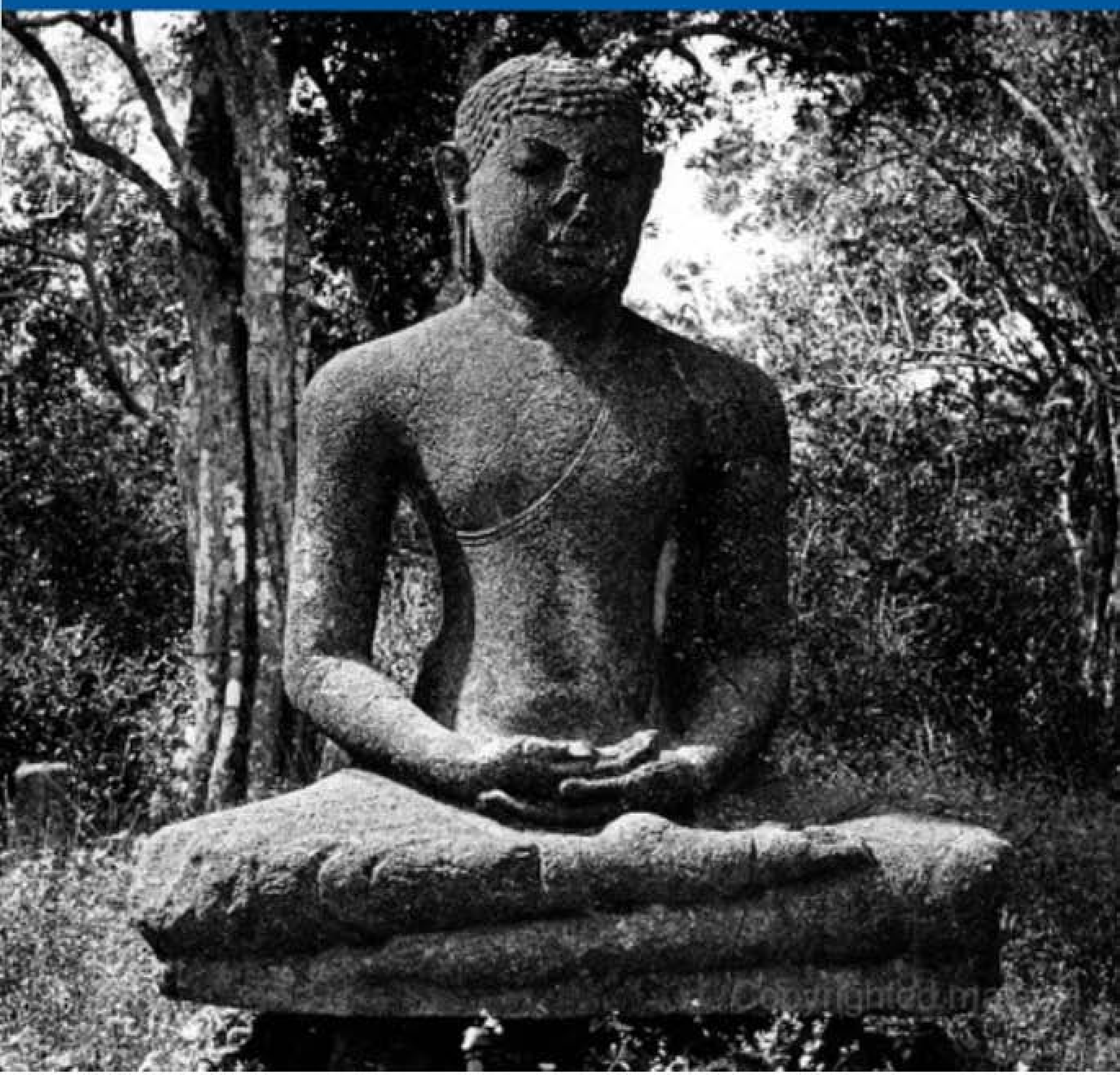
Rethinking THE BUDDHA

Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception

EVIATAR SHULMAN



RETHINKING THE BUDDHA

A cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, the doctrine of the four noble truths maintains that life is replete with suffering, desire is the cause of suffering, nirvana is the end of suffering, and the way to nirvana is the eightfold noble path. Although the attribution of this seminal doctrine to the historical Buddha is ubiquitous, *Rethinking the Buddha* demonstrates through a careful examination of early Buddhist texts that he did not envision them in this way. Shulman traces the development of what we now call the four noble truths, which in fact originated as observations to be cultivated during deep meditation. The early texts reveal that other central Buddhist doctrines, such as dependent origination and selflessness, similarly derived from meditative observations. This book challenges the conventional view that the Buddha's teachings represent universal themes of human existence, allowing for a fresh, compelling explanation of the Buddhist theory of liberation.

EVIATAR SHULMAN is a postdoctoral fellow at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Scholion Center. He has taught at The Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Ben Gurion University, and Bar Ilan University. His articles have appeared in *History of Religions*, the *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, the *Indo-Iranian Journal*, and the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. He is the author of two books in translation; *The Root Verses of the Middle Way: A Translation of Nāgārjuna's* Mūla Madhyamaka kārikā (2010) and *Song of Enlightenment: Translations from Ancient Buddhist Poetry* (2013).

RETHINKING THE BUDDHA

Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception

EVIATAR SHULMAN

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107062399

First published 2014

Printed in the United States by Sheridan Inc.

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Shulman, Eviatar, author.
Rethinking the Buddha : early Buddhist philosophy as meditative perception / Eviatar Shulman, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-1-107-06239-9 (Hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-69538-2 (pbk.) 1. Meditation–Buddhism. 2. Buddhist philosophy. 3. Buddhism–Doctrines. I. Title.
BQ5612.S535 2014
294.3′4435–dc23 2013045300

ISBN 978-1-107-06239-9 Hardback

For my parents,
who taught me to rethink.

Contents

Preface

Buddhist philosophy has something of a magical appeal. Many expect the Buddha, the man who is thought to have brought human potential to its fullest possible fruition, to supply penetrating insights into and solutions for our personal and collective ailments. The Buddha is supposedly capable of this since he is "enlightened" or "awake"; resonant images of mature philosophical presence and cultured awareness. These grand hopes tend, however, to obscure the deep chasm between us and the Buddha, the renunciate who flourished in the Indian forests some two and one-half millennia ago. The beliefs harbored by his fellow men and the realities they were troubled by were very different from our own. Although it is uncontestable that he designed a compelling system of thought and of spiritual praxis that is pregnant with therapeutic potential, his teachings – or at least the main doctrines attributed to him – have so far been presented in ways that cater too easily to the tastes and preferences of modern audiences. The reading strategies of this new Buddhist crowd were eager to appropriate the elements of Buddhist discourse they found meaningful and to ignore the developmental processes the teachings went through. They thus adopted later formulations of Buddhist doctrine and identified these as the message of the awakened Buddha. This study aims to evaluate the philosophy articulated in the early Buddhist texts without reading modern aspirations and existential problems into them; these were themselves nourished by interpretations that were more often than not developed within the Buddhist traditions of Asia.

This book makes two revisionary claims, both of which dramatically challenge the prevalent understanding of the teachings attributed to the historical Buddha. The first is that the early Buddhist discourses betray almost no familiarity with the doctrine known as the four noble truths, generally regarded as the hallmark of Buddhist thought; the Buddha – to the degree that he can be accessed through the early discourses of the Pāli canon – did not teach that life is replete with pain, that desire is the cause

of this pain, that nirvāṇa is the end of pain, and that the eightfold noble path paves the way toward this blessed end. Rather, when the early discourses refer to the instruction that grew to become "the four noble truths," they speak of a specific, concise set of meditative observations, which reflect on the conditioned contents of awareness and witness the processes by which these rise and fall. Almost ubiquitously, "the four noble truths" are not "noble" and are not "truths" but are tightly structured forms of meditative perception that allow a practitioner to react to the contents she encounters in her meditation in a way that was sanctioned by the early Buddhists. She is to practice this method of reflection to the degree that she spontaneously sees and experiences the events that arise in her mind according to its imprint.

A similar point can be made regarding the two other seminal philosophical doctrines of Buddhism – dependent-origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and selflessness (*anatta*). These were not, originally, universally applicable laws of conditionality and of essencelessness, respectively, but complementary methods of observing mental occurrences in meditation. These doctrines were at first schemes of analysis that were meant to guide the running perceptual process of meditation. They were fashioned in order to instruct one to see things in a way that accords with Buddhist metaphysical intuitions and to induce a mental stance of detachment. This is a lived philosophy in the deepest sense possible, in which theoretical positions are to be ingrained in the mind as the result of diligent practice. We are not speaking of ideas but of intense, dedicated, meditative practice.

The philosophical doctrines of Buddhism thus emerged from specific, well-defined meditative perceptions, which were part of a sustained effort to give new shape to (or at times possibly to transcend) experience. The early Buddhist teachings were first of all verbalized reflections on meditative events. These reflections were then meant to guide meditative observation in order to cause future experiences to conform to these patterns of thought. Early Buddhist philosophy was thus first and foremost both a description of and a prescription for meditative experience.

How theses meditative perceptions became the doctrines we are familiar with today is a story that will not be told here. This was a natural, organic development, albeit one that had a remarkably powerful impact on the Buddhist philosophical culture. Theoretical philosophical impulses were surely not alien to the early Buddhists; indeed, the lived philosophy we are speaking of is entrenched in a comprehensive, powerful, and demanding metaphysic, which contrasts karma and liberation and which one would have had to contemplate in order to perform the practice.

The need to address larger philosophical concerns and wider audiences with less expertise is evident as well. The meditative perceptions we will be discussing also easily lend themselves to captivating philosophical positions: the general law of causality that is referred to today by the concept of dependent-origination is surely related to the observation of the conditionality of mental events that was at the earlier heart of the doctrine: that "desire is the cause of suffering" is a legitimate, if somewhat diluted, abstraction of the four observations that became the four noble truths; and essencelessness is the natural philosophical gravitational center of the doctrine of selflessness. But the cogency of Buddhist doctrine should not conceal the earlier layers of the teachings, which are the main interest of the early texts. A good, close-enough reading of these texts teaches us much more than has yet to be appreciated about the methods and goals of the early Buddhists.

The second main claim that will be developed in the following pages is that the central early Buddhist theory of liberation makes sense and can be understood. When we appreciate that Buddhist philosophy was at first a form of meditative perception, we can grasp the way the authors of the Pāli discourses viewed liberation. There are different approaches to liberation in the early texts, but one appears to have been favored as an account of the specific event of enlightenment. This description or theory – here we regrettably have to put aside the creative and aesthetic elements at work in shaping the image of "enlightenment"[1] – speaks of a counter intuitive combination between profound, densely calm, meditative *samādhi*, on the one hand, and philosophical insight on the other. At first sight, the joining of philosophy and supposedly "mystical" states of mind seems unreasonable, and in fact this approach to liberation was normally discarded by scholars of Buddhism. Their approach relies, however, on a fundamental mistake – they read younger philosophical doctrines into the more restricted, carefully designed words of the texts. When the later philosophical developments are set aside and philosophy is understood to be a structured form of meditative observation, the logic of this particular notion of liberation becomes clearer – awakening was perceived as a philosophical perception and not as a philosophical understanding, which was experienced in the deep meditative state of *jhāna*. At liberation, one spontaneously interprets the events that arise in meditation according to the logic of the philosophy, without having to contemplate its ideas

[1] For initial steps in this direction, see Shulman (forthcoming).

conceptually. Philosophy, as a form of direct perception that has been practiced to perfection, can be *perceived* in *jhāna*.

In order to make these claims, prevalent conceptions of the Buddha and of his message must be reworked so that they will better reflect the texts. Indeed, it must be highlighted that this study is about texts: I will be discussing the early *suttas* ("discourses") and my main contribution will be an improved comprehension of their approach to philosophy. Scholars have grown overly suspicious, however, of the reliability of these texts as representations of the historical realities of early Buddhism, given the vagueness regarding the manner in which they were composed. These experts have warned of romanticized images of the Buddha, which are based on idealized textual presentations and that may have had little to do with Buddhism on the ground.[2] I am both sympathetic to these claims and uneasy about the forcefulness with which they have been advocated. I express my personal understanding below that the texts do go back to the earlier stages of Buddhism *to some degree*. I am, nonetheless, content to rest with the position that the Buddha of the Pāli canon, as a literary hero, can be better understood and to leave the judgment regarding the historicity of the materials to my readers. This thorny problem is addressed in the concluding section of Chapter 1.

The heart of the present study can be defined as an attempt to explain early Buddhist philosophy as a meditative phenomenon. Philosophy had other venues as well, but its most cherished function was to provide the structure for liberating meditative visions. That philosophy functioned in meditation is not my axiomatic assumption; it is what the texts unambiguously say. Specifically, the main theory of enlightenment in the early discourses says that the Buddha awoke to three types of knowledge in the deep meditative *samādhi* of the fourth *jhāna*. The third and definitive knowledge, titled "the destruction of the inflows" (*āsavānaṃ khayo*), is achieved through a meditative vision at the heart of which appears a condensed formulaic presentation of the philosophical doctrine known as the four noble truths. My goal is to explain the logic behind this textual statement by showing how philosophy can be thought to function in such a limpid, quieted mind.

In order to understand the texts at this point, we need a "non-conceptual philosophy," or a philosophy that can become a form of immediate experience rather than remain an abstract theory or inquiry. I argue that when Buddhist philosophical understanding is cultivated to a degree that it

[2] Schopen (1997: ch. 1) is the most eloquent and forceful expression of this position.

becomes cognitive nature, when it functions as insight in a deeply embodied sense, it no longer needs to be thought of or contemplated but can be directly seen and experienced in meditation. It is this philosophy that has become profoundly ingrained in the mind that structures the events that the texts describe as liberating. This language of condensed philosophical perceptions is also the one that the texts employ when they introduce the most fundamental Buddhist philosophical doctrines, most notably that of the four noble truths.

My exposition will proceed along the following path. Chapter 1 highlights the need to integrate philosophy and meditation in light of the principal scriptural depictions of liberation. It shows how scholars have avoided trusting the texts and have forced them to voice positions not their own. I then focus on the central theory of liberation advanced in the Nikāyas and ask what kind of thinking is behind it. I also demonstrate that other important theories of liberation in the early texts conform to the same basic pattern as the central theory of liberation – most of these theories speak of the destruction of negative potencies (*āsava*) through wisdom in a state of deep meditation. The attempt to understand this statement is thus set as a main goal for this study. I then situate the discussion in two broader theoretical perspectives, which relate to the role of meditative experience in the creation of Buddhist philosophy and the position of Buddhism as an ascetic, renunciate tradition. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the delicate issue of the relationship between the texts and the historical realities of early Buddhism.

Chapter 2 moves on to discuss the Buddha's overall approach to philosophy and offers fresh insights into the theme of the unanswered questions and the early meanings of dependent-origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and selflessness (*anatta*). The chapter shows that although early Buddhist philosophy was couched in a comprehensive metaphysical framework, it had little interest in abstract philosophizing. Its main goal was to make sense of subjective, human reality in order to allow its dedicated students to obtain a psychological solution to a metaphysical problem – the inherent connection between life and repeated, uncontrollable afterlife. From the start, this philosophy concerned itself only with what is of direct consequence to experienced human life. Dependent-origination, for example, focused initially on the nature of what can be called mental or subjective conditioning; this includes the conditioning of both present experience and future rebirth through subjective input. This idea is not, at this stage, a general theory of conditionality with ontological ramifications. This chapter thus demonstrates that philosophical analysis in early

Buddhism had little pure theoretical impulse and was naturally connected to a culture of mental cultivation. Ideally, it worked teleologically toward liberation. Although to some degree this theme is not new, my discussion takes this understanding a step further by showing how it operates in the most central Buddhist philosophical doctrines; along the way these doctrines are defined anew.

Chapter 3, which in some ways is the most demanding of this book, inquires into the manner in which the more general philosophical interest in human subjectivity is translated into concrete meditative experiences – it explains how philosophical ideas become direct perception. This crucial understanding is reached through a discussion of the notion of "mindfulness," (*sati*) mainly in light of the seminal *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (SPS). The chapter shows that "mindfulness" expresses a mental reality that has become fully attuned to early Buddhist philosophical ideas. The SPS is shown to be a compendium of meditations that are shaped in order to habituate the mind to naturally envisage its experiences in light of Buddhist understanding. Then I discuss how *sati* is related to *jhāna*. Ultimately, the point is that Buddhist philosophy is to be immediately experienced as a concrete perception of specific mental events in *jhāna*.

Chapter 4, which in many respects is the heart of this book, focuses on the earlier textual presentation of the four noble truths. The early texts have next to no interest in "noble truths," but are intensely engaged in a set of four concrete, meditative observations that later became the "four noble truths" (4NTs); not "life is suffering," but "*this* is suffering," etc. I then unravel the relationship between this teaching of the four (noble) truths as a meditative perception and the teachings of dependent-origination and selflessness; all three doctrines originate from one fundamental vision that focuses on the arising and passing away of conditioned, mental events. Equipped with this understanding, the central theory of liberation is explained. This chapter ends by recommending a new approach to the first Buddhist sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, an approach which sees its conventional presentation of the 4NTs as a late addition.

What I present here is no more and no less than a fresh reading of the Pāli texts, which I believe can be trusted at least to mean what they say. If this basic assumption can be granted, a renewed encounter with these texts is called for since they rarely speak the messages modern students of Buddhism have seen as the most fundamental outlook of the tradition. I believe this new encounter affords fresh insights into the way both philosophy and liberation were envisioned by the authors of the Pāli discourses.

Before proceeding to the main body of the study, some advice to the different audiences that may read this book is in order. In this contribution to the august tradition of Buddhist textual interpretation, I have attempted to tread a fine line between too much and too little detail, that is between hedonism and asceticism. Some readers will feel I have been too careful and will benefit more from my persistent effort to make the main issues as clear as I possibly can as I proceed. These readers may wish to skip parts of the textual presentations and of the discussion of technicalities. Others will feel that too many texts have not been referred to and that I have not been careful enough in choosing and interpreting my sources. They may consider my conclusions too strong. To these readers, I recommend paying close attention to the footnotes, which fill in much of the missing pieces of the puzzle. I trust most readers will reach the far shore of this book with open questions. I hope, however, that at the same time they will acknowledge that the framework for the discussion of early Buddhist philosophy has shifted from the realms of theory to those of meditative observation.

Acknowledgments

This book has benefited from the input of many people, and it is due to their contributions that it has an author. The original insights at the heart of this study crystallized when I was writing my dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the guidance of Yael Bentor and Yohanan Grinshpon. The dissertation analyzed the philosophy of Nāgārjuna, but I was provided with tools that allowed me to read a wide variety of materials. Yael Bentor taught me how to approach Buddhist texts and how to read them with an eye that cuts through their cover-images. She converted my mind to one that can think critically and historically. Yohanan Grinshpon persistently encouraged me to think in a strong and free manner about the deep messages of these texts. Both are responsible for setting me on my academic path. Over the past decade, my inquisitive students at the different universities of Israel as well as in non-academic circles helped me think through the materials in a way that forced me to make real sense of them; this enabled me to see through some of the more conventional approaches to Buddhism and read the texts anew.

Special thanks are due to Rod Bucknell, Eli Franco, and Venerable Anālayo, who read the whole of the manuscript and offered valuable, constructive criticism. Peter Harvey read a good part of the manuscript and provided important insights as well as did the three anonymous readers from Cambridge University Press. This book would have been far more imperfect without their reading.

Thanks also to the Scholion Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who allowed me to make use of their facilities even before I began my tenure as a Mandel postdoctoral fellow. This gave me the peace of mind that allowed me to bring the book to its final shape.

Laura Morris, my editor at Cambridge University Press, gracefully guided me through the review and production process. She has been at the same time fully professional and wonderfully pleasant to work with.

Participating in both my academic and family circles is my father, David Shulman, at one and the same time a professional support and a loving, guiding presence. Intuitively bringing me the right book at the right moment and intimately knowledgeable about so many aspects of Indian civilization, he has also greatly contributed to my scholarship.

Somehow the genre of acknowledgments leaves the most important contributions last. Many friends and family members have given most valuable support. My mother, Eileen Shulman, as well as my mother-in-law, Silvana Winer, gave especially warm, reliable backing. Mostly, my children, Nahar, Inbal, Laila, and Be'er have filled my being with joy and motivation. And Yara, the confident voice of truth who makes everything possible, my true love, partner, and friend – without you none of this would have ever materialized.

Abbreviations

4NTs	The Four Noble Truths
AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
APS	*Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*
ĀSS	*Ānāpānasati-sutta*
AV	*Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
BJS	*Brahmajāla-sutta*
CPD	*Critical Pāli Dictionary*
DBS	*Dantabhūmi-sutta*
DCP	*Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
KGSS	*Kāyagatāsati-sutta*
KN	*Khuddaka Nikāya*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
MWSD	Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary
NS	*Nidāna-saṃyutta*
PED	*Pāli-English Dictionary*
Skt	Sanskrit
SN	*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*
SNip	*Sutta Nipāta*
SPS	*Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*
SPhS	*Sāmaññaphala-sutta*

CHAPTER I

The Structural Relationship between Philosophy and Meditation

A central aim of this book is to integrate the two most important aspects of the early Buddhist notion of liberation: philosophy and meditation. While the early Buddhist texts normally state that awakening involves the perfection of both philosophical understanding and deep meditative concentration, traditional and modern scholars of early Buddhism have exhibited a marked tendency to divorce the two: the Buddha's achievement is generally understood as *either* a philosophical understanding – which meditation can, possibly, allow one to realize more fully – *or* a meditative experience that philosophy cannot capture and to which it is fundamentally alien. In what follows I will attempt to demonstrate and explain how, for the early Buddhist tradition, philosophy was not only an integral part of meditation but even the acme of meditative practice. This is not because philosophy was for the early Buddhists an intuitive form of wisdom, but because philosophical analysis was used by them very differently than the way it most commonly functions today. For them, philosophical analysis was meant to change the very structure of perception; the most meaningful and valued moments of meditation, those in which liberation took place, were composed of direct perceptions of embodied philosophical understandings. These were, in fact, philosophical perceptions, not philosophical understandings.

The main point this study will make is that the "four noble truths" (4NTs) were originally not four "truths" but rather four elements in a coherent set of meditative observations. These meditative observations were not concerned in any way with the doctrine of the 4NTs as it is commonly taught; that life is pain, the cause of which is desire and that will end in nibbāna, which itself will be attained once the noble eightfold path is perfected. If the early Buddhist texts are to be trusted, it appears that the original set of "four observations" was rather a unique, highly specified method of reflection, which was practiced to perfection in a meditative setting. These observations focused on particular, concrete,

and specific mental contents. It will take some work before this point can be fully fleshed out, and in order to get us started, we will begin by examining the most important context in which the four observations are at work – in the central theory of liberation in the Nikāyas. This will be the main focus of the present chapter.

At the outset, we must deal with a problem of terminology. I employ the terms I have used so far – liberation, philosophy, meditation – with a good degree of dissatisfaction, not to say disillusionment. Although I agree that the Buddhist path is or can be highly transformative and meaningful, I find notions such as "liberation," "enlightenment," and "awakening" overused, laden with fantasy, and inherently vague. These last terms, as I believe they are used today, all suggest that "liberation" is a fixed and final event, which involves a complete knowledge of ultimate truth, an absolute sense of freedom or joy, or a full achievement of the true goal for of all mankind. But liberation may be something more specific, less absolute, but nevertheless still deeply meaningful and transformative, which relates to particular persons and cultural contexts. Indeed, the Buddhist texts even speak of "wrong liberation" (*micchā vimutti*) and count many types of liberation, which suggests that we are not speaking only of one definitive event.[1] We may say that liberation is an ideal the texts correspond with.[2]

Furthermore, while there is no reason to doubt that the Buddha had profound liberating experiences, which apparently included a confident sense of realization, calm, and well-being and which must have stimulated undeniable mental and emotional change, the available terms we have to characterize these experiences – such as "religious," "spiritual," or "mystical" – all introduce a wide range of associations that are irrelevant to the context. At the time of his so-called awakening, for instance, the Buddha had yet to found a "religion" and his experience may have been just as "corporeal" as it was "spiritual." What "mystical" means is

[1] The *Mahācattārisaka-sutta* of the MN (117) demonstrates a profound distinction between Western and Indian notions of "liberation." In this text (MN III.77) the Buddha speaks of "right" and "wrong" "liberation," caused, ultimately, by right or wrong views. The very fact that the term "wrong liberation" can be conceived of suggests that "liberation" can have many textures and that it was not understood only as a yes-or-no, black-or-white event. The term also appears a number of times in the *Sallekha-sutta* (MN 8) as well as at SN II.169, SN V.20, V.383, and AN II.221–25. It is particularly common in the "book of tens" of the AN since it is annexed together with "wrong knowledge (*micchā-ñāṇa*) to the eight corresponding "wrong" counterparts of the eightfold noble path to form a list of ten. In this context the well-known list of "eight liberations," best known from the *Mahānidāna-sutta* of the DN, should also be mentioned. See also Collins's (1995: 160–61) illuminating suggestion to view *nibbāna* as a process, rather than as a final event and the discussion of different types of liberation in de Silva (1978) and Anālayo (2009: 148–56).

[2] Collins's (1995; 2010) notion of nirvāṇa as narrative and systematic "closure" is of interest in this respect.

itself quite a mystical question, and the spontaneous meanings coming out of the monotheistic creeds (such as "union with the Godhead") or out of Occidental philosophy ("what cannot be captured by words") are out of place. The notion of "trance" is also problematic since in the Buddhist case we are speaking of experiences that involve a nearly inconceivable amount of control and that are designed to the smallest detail. Similar problems arise in relation to the terms "philosophy" and "meditation" themselves, both reserved for distinctly Western forms of scientific, analytical, or religious inquiries. This should remind us that all too often our immediately available concepts, as well as the thought patterns we are accustomed to, conceal more than they reveal and leave us dangling in our own culturally conditioned world of religious meaning.

A short exposition of the central terms I refer to as "meditation" and "philosophy" is therefore in order so as to facilitate an appreciation of the types of mental attitudes we will be discussing. The early Buddhist texts (I explain just what I intend by the "early" in the final section of this chapter) guide the Buddha's students through highly specified forms of mental habitation, generally dubbed in English "meditation" while terms such as "trance," "concentration," or "meditative/mystical states" are also common. "Concentration" conveys the gist of the Pāli (or Sanskrit) *samādhi*, although *samādhi* has a more specific sense than the associations brought about by the common English use of the word. *Samādhi* comes from the root *sam+ā<dhā>*, meaning literally "to put together," and thus usually denotes a state in which the mind becomes fully concentrated and is characterized by "one-pointedness" (*ekaggatā*).[3] *Samādhi* involves a markedly quiet state of mind in which no distractions occur and in which mental contents are experienced in exceptionally rich fashion. Specifically, the Buddhist texts speak of a series of *samādhi* states termed *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*), derived from Sanskrit *dhī* (root *dhyai*), which denotes an intelligence that can be more theoretical or intuitive.[4] In this particular context, *jhāna* speaks of specific states of mind in which awareness is deeply concentrated, self-contained, powerful, rich, and meaningful. In these *jhānic* states, thought and certain forms of sensation are said to subside while there is an evident sense of purified, calm well-being. It is precisely in these states of *jhāna* (or in similar states outlined in

[3] Anālayo (2003: 72) rather speaks of the term coming from the verb *samādahati*, "put together, to collect." As this study focuses on Pāli scriptures, I will generally mention the terms as they are used in Pāli without supplying their Sanskrit equivalent.

[4] Crangle (1994: 39–46).

the texts but defined differently) that true knowledge is said to arise, or that philosophy is said to function. Indeed, this is an enigma we will have to address.

The early texts describe a second central type of meditation, which relies on sustained reflection and analysis. This method aims to develop *sati*, "mindfulness," and was later referred to as *vipassanā* or "insight meditation." Chapter 3 is devoted to a discussion of this second type of meditative practice, and there I will also show how it connects to *samādhi*. Suffice it for now to say that this method involves intense observation of mental content, which is aided by a familiarity with Buddhist conceptual schemas. There are other important terms for meditation in the early texts, most importantly *bhāvanā* (literally "bringing into being" or "practice"), which are of lesser concern for the present context. In the present chapter, which focuses on the early theory of liberation, the meditations of the *samādhi* genre are our primary interest.

Naturally, we may wonder just what kind of philosophy can be contemplated in spheres so remote from where it is normally cultivated.[5] What should we make of a philosophy that does not involve active thinking, which in some sense is beyond words? Before we attempt to answer these questions, we must appreciate that our common intuitions about "philosophy" are somewhat removed from the corresponding Buddhist approaches. In the modern West, philosophy may be defined as the persistent, patient effort to capture truth with words. At least as it is practiced today, philosophy is primarily a method of analysis that relies on arguments and carefully reasoned thinking. It is thus inherently conceptual, and truth, if it can ever be obtained securely, relies on a logical structure, whose building blocks are arguments.[6] While Buddhist philosophers practiced this sort of enterprise in different stages of Buddhism's philosophical maturation,[7] including in its early stages, early Buddhist thought should be seen as an instantiation of ancient philosophy, which has a strong practical orientation, and which aims to transform

[5] See the reference to the works of Griffiths (1981; 1983; 1986), Vetter (1988); Wynne (2007); and Bronkhorst (2009).

[6] According to Siderits (2007: 5), "Philosophy, then, is the systematic investigation of questions in ethics, metaphysics and epistemology (as well as several related fields). It involves using analysis and argumentation in systematic and reflective ways." For Siderits, what makes someone a philosopher, including in Buddhism, is that his claims are subject to rational scrutiny. Studies such as Morgan (2000) suggest that there is more to philosophy than reasoned argument and that ancient philosophy in particular is closely related to myth. Scholars of Buddhist philosophy such as Siderits, however, hope to show that Buddhism is philosophical by more modern standards.

[7] Kapstein (2001: esp. ch. 1); Siderits (2007).

human life.[8] The value of such philosophy does not lie in abstract, theoretical reflection; it is not meant to be put in a book, but is meant to be lived – that is, it is meant to be cultivated, practiced, and experienced. Early Buddhist philosophy – "the love of wisdom" we recall, not the love of arguments – is closer in spirit to Socrates drinking the poison he knows will kill him than to modern analytic philosophy. Pierre Hadot describes the character of the ancient, classical philosophy of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman periods in the following words:

> In the view of all philosophical schools, mankind's principal cause of suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness were the passions: that is, unregu lated desires and exaggerated fears. . . . Philosophy thus appears, in the first place as a therapeutic of the passions. . . . Each school had its own thera peutic method, but all of them linked their therapeutic to a profound transformation of the individual's mode of seeing and being. The object of spiritual exercises is precisely to bring about this transformation.[9]

We will see that early Buddhist thought is an extreme form of this practically oriented, personally relevant, lived philosophy of "spiritual exercises."

In Indian Buddhist cultures of mental cultivation, philosophy becomes a form of being, or more specifically a "way of seeing" (Skt. *darśana, dṛṣṭi*). Terms such as *paññā*, *ñāṇa*, and *aññā*, which can all mean something like "knowledge" or "understanding," tend to refer more to concrete knowledge than to abstract forms of thinking. When one "knows," for example, that one's body is not-one's-self (*anatta*), this act of knowing refers to a particular way of observing the body. This vision obviously possesses theoretical significance, but the latter is secondary to the primary practical one. As Halbfass (1988: ch. 15, 1991: ch. 7) has shown, this approach to philosophy is characteristic of the Indian philosophical milieu as a whole.[10]

[8] Jordan (1990) speaks of contrasts between ancient and modern philosophy, the first and most meaningful of which is the practical aspect of ancient, primarily Greek, philosophy, as opposed to the theoretical orientation of the modern one. This difference has an institutional counterpart in the modern philosopher's job at the university, compared to the ancient learning in distinct schools. According to Jordan, the ultimate goal of early philosophy was to create understanding in a robust practical sense. See also Hadot (1996: 61): "One cannot read an ancient author the way one does a contemporary author"; as well as Hadot (2002).

[9] Hadot (1996: 83). Kapstein (2001: 7) quotes Hadot as well: "For Plato, training for death is a spiritual exercise which consists in changing one's point of view. We are to change from a vision of things dominated by individual passions to a representation of the world governed by the universality and objectivity of thought. This constitutes a conversion (*metastophe*) brought about with the totality of the soul."

[10] See especially Halbfass's (1988: 272) remarks on the Buddhist approach to philosophy and on the "soteriological negligence" involved in pure speculation (*dṛṣṭi/diṭṭhi*). See also Kapstein's (2001: ch. 11) discussion of Heinrich Zimmer's approach to Indian philosophy and to philosophy in

Returning to our main theme, the early Buddhist notion of philosophy is most easily appreciated in the context of the discussion of liberation. We will carefully analyze the central theory of liberation in the early texts below. For now, let us begin by getting some sense of its most salient features. The texts first relate the successive entrance into four deep meditative states, the four *jhānas*. At this point it will do to look at the second and the fourth of these. The Buddha says:

> Following the quieting of thought and analysis, I entered upon and abided in the second *jhāna*, which is the inner serenity of mind that is unified, devoid of thought and analysis, born of concentration, and characterized by pleasure and joy.
>
> . . . Following the abandonment of [bodily] pleasure and pain, and following the earlier passing away of mental pleasure and pain, I entered and abided in the fourth *jhāna*, in which there is no pleasure and pain and which is characterized by equanimity, mindfulness and purity.

The terse words of the text must be examined attentively. Clearly these are limpid, excessively calm states of mind, which are integrally distinct from normal, waking consciousness. Here the mind becomes unified, serene, concentrated, and mindful; it transcends conceptuality and sensation at least to a substantial degree. Yet it is in these states that the texts now speak of the awakening to liberating knowledge. However puzzling this may be, the texts are unambiguous about the possibility of knowledge arising in these states as they now describe three understandings that take place in the fourth *jhāna*. The first is the Buddha's perception of his own former births; the second is a penetration of the law of karmic determination. The third knowledge, the event of enlightenment, is this:

> Then, when my concentrated mind was pure, clean, untarnished, free of defilements, supple, workable, steady, beyond vacillation, I directed the mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows. I realized truly "this is suffering," I realized truly "this is the arising of suffering," I realized truly "this is the cessation of suffering," I realized truly "this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering." I realized truly "these are inflows," I realized truly "this is the arising of inflows," I realized truly "this is the cessation of inflows," I realized truly "this is the path that leads to the cessation of inflows." Knowing and seeing thus, my mind was liberated from the inflows of desire, from the inflows of [craving for] existence and from the inflows of ignorance.

general, which is in line with the "philosophies of life" or "transformative philosophy" of philosophers like Nietzsche, Dilthey, and most importantly Schopenhauer.

The connection between philosophical understanding and deep, quiet meditation is the chief characteristic of this approach to liberation. The Buddha here realizes the reality of suffering and comprehends the causal processes that bring about its arising and cessation. He attains a full grasp of Buddhist philosophical truth.

If we are to take the tradition seriously, it must be explained how the authors of this seminal presentation of enlightenment felt that philosophical understanding can occur in such a quiet state of mind. Nonetheless, there is no scholarly work that offers a convincing or even a plausible explanation of what the occurrence of wisdom in *samādhi* might actually mean. How can it be that a profound experience of knowledge can occur when the mind is deeply absorbed in a concentrated and almost stilled trance? What does it mean to know something, such as the 4NTs, in a silent mind that has transcended or annulled conceptuality? Rather than attempting to answer these questions, scholars have tended to adopt one of the following two avoidance strategies: either (1) meditation is said to be a preliminary technique of mental cultivation, which precedes the moments of insight and prepares the mind for them or (2) philosophy is said to be epiphenomenal to the liberating experience, which is understood to be a type of *samādhi*, most commonly of *jhāna*. When we are in need of a creative explanation for the nature of knowledge in *jhāna*, the experts on these topics have been inclined to circumvent the problem.[11]

[11] It is important to see that these scholarly positions echo the main ways in which the historical Buddhist traditions inclined to cope with the same difficulty. As Buddhism matured, philosophy developed and *jhāna* fell from favor. The earlier stages of this process are outlined in Gombrich (1996: ch. 4). See also Sujato (2006). A prime example of this approach is the modern *Vipassanā* traditions, with their emphasis on correct understanding; see Hart (1987: ch. 7, 8) and Mahasi Sayadaw (1990: 50). The dismissal of *jhāna* is strong in Mahāyāna Buddhism as well. In Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, for instance, the chapter on *dhyāna* includes but one verse compared to the 226 verses of the following chapter on wisdom.

Other traditions retained the notion that enlightenment fully transcends regular forms of human cognition and is thus similar to *jhānic* stillness. Candrakīrti, who was foundational for the early Tibetan Prāsaṅgika tradition, is again a good example (see Almogi [2009]; Dunne [1996]; MacDonald [2009]; Vose [2009]). Examples from non-Mahāyāna traditions demand too much interpretation regarding what is early or late in meditation theory. That this position was raised already in the early Buddhist meditative context is evidenced by SNip 875–77.

An exception to the dissociation of wisdom and *samādhi* – and there were surely many more – is the approach of the Sarvāstivādin abhidharma as discussed in Cox (1992). Traditional approaches often employ an alternate application of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditations. Relying on texts such as the *Anupada-sutta* (MN 111; III. 26), Crangle (1994) suggests that the practitioner applies wisdom after meditative states have been achieved so as to realize their impermanence, suffering, and non-selfhood (216, 262–65). In Crangle's study, wisdom and concentration are intimately related but are practiced one after another rather than simultaneously. See also King (1992: esp. ch. 6), who relies on Buddhaghosa in saying that *vipassanā* ensures that *jhāna* will not be a mere yogic trance; *Vipassanā* is used in *jhāna* to purify it and maintain its Buddhist emphases.

Let us examine an example for each of the two scholarly strategies of interpretation just outlined. Both examples come from recent books by two of the most distinguished and widely read scholars of early Buddhism – Richard Gombrich's *What the Buddha Thought* and Johannes Bronkhorst's *Buddhist Teachings in India*. Although I find much value in both these works, they both suffer from one fundamental flaw: they allow no real connection between philosophy and meditation.

The front cover of Gombrich's *What the Buddha Thought* exemplifies much of what is primary for our concerns. In minimalist style, on a bright white background, only two items appear (aside from the name of the author): the title of the book and a picture of a beautiful Thai bronze of the Buddha. The straightforward title, which emphasizes the Buddha as a thinker and a philosopher, appears far removed from the image of the Buddha next to which it is placed. Like so many other artistic presentations of the Buddha, particularly those made south of the Himalayas, this statue presents the Buddha in serene meditation. It should be evident to anyone who gazes at this Thai portrayal of the Buddha that he is doing anything but *thinking*. In fact, the competent artist probably wished to portray the Buddha in mental realms that are precisely beyond the ones in which thinking occurs. This non-thinking Buddha is seated in meditation and is at most observing or reflecting on the mental events he experiences in his focused and stilled mind. These reflections, if they are at all intended, may lend themselves to a "philosophy" when they are abstracted from the mental context in which they take place, but it would be quite difficult to understand them as the Buddha's "thought" in the sense intended by Gombrich.

This discrepancy on the cover is representative of the book's contents. In the opening paragraph of his preface, Gombrich, in characteristically commendable clarity, states: "This book argues that the Buddha was one of the most brilliant and original thinkers of all time." (p. vii). Gombrich proceeds to class the Buddha with "Plato and Aristotle, the giants who created the tradition of Western Philosophy" (p. 1),[12] and later even defines the Buddha as "a remarkable brain" (p. 17). Referring to a question he raised in an earlier publication as to whether the Buddha intended a philosophy, Gombrich admits that the Buddha may not have been "interested in *presenting* a philosophically coherent doctrine" since "the evidence that his concern was pragmatic, to guide his audience's actions, is overwhelming." But Gombrich is also certain "that the evidence that he had

[12] On page 4, Gombrich adds David Hume to this short but august list.

evolved such a structure of thought and that it underpinned his pragmatic advice is no less compelling."[13]

The pragmatic and even anti-metaphysical approach to the Buddha's "thought" is a popular theme in the modern study of Buddhism.[14] But the pragmatic element in the Buddha's teachings expresses only an initial, rather timid step in the direction of understanding Buddhist philosophy in its true context as a meditative phenomenon. It is therefore important to notice Gombrich's removal of meditation – specifically *samādhi* or *jhāna* meditation – from the context of the discussion. Gombrich does emphasize that the Buddha's teachings are not abstract reasonings but rather that they relate to conscious human experience.[15] Nonetheless, he ignores the fact that from the perspective of the texts, the most dramatic events in which philosophy functions – when the Buddha becomes enlightened – take place in *samādhi*.[16]

The difficulty would have been less pressing if Gombrich had been less emphatic about his wish to appreciate the Buddha in his own historical context. Gombrich is clear that he sees his method as historical (p. 4) and that he is attempting "a successful interpretation of the Buddha. . . as the source for a successful history of Buddhist ideas" (p. 3).[17] Moreover,

[13] P. 164, emphasis in the original. Gombrich is referring here to his discussion in Gombrich (1996: ch. 2). In his earlier publication, the discussion of the question if the Buddha was a philosopher ultimately remains open as Gombrich states that he believes it probably cannot be answered. He further suggests there that the focus of the Buddha's enlightenment was his experience and that the rise of Buddhist philosophy was an "unintended consequence" conditioned by "the logic of the situation" in which the Buddha's curious students demanded answers for their spiritual pursuits.

[14] Gombrich is a prime example of this genre; see especially chapter 11 of his book. For other examples see Rahula (1974 [1959]); Vetter (1988: xi, 40–41); Gombrich (1996: ch. 1, 2, especially pp. 16, 18); Hamliton (1996: 194); Ronkin (2005: 4–5).

[15] For example, p. 9: "the Buddha is not primarily concerned with what exists – in fact, he thinks that is a red herring – but with what we can experience, what can be present to consciousness." Gombrich's ideas on this issue have been influenced by the work of Sue Hamilton (see, ch. 2, pp. 62–63).

[16] On pp. 171–172, Gombrich makes a short mention of "meditation praxis." He makes no mention of *jhāna* in this cursory reference and says: "the training in concentration, awareness, and the use of imagination are pragmatically necessary in order to make us better at thinking in general." Indeed, this is the classic position of those who downgrade meditation in favor of philosophical understanding. Other studies that downplay the role of meditation in the early Buddhist path are Conze (1959); Rahula (1974 [1959]); Collins (1982, 1995, 2010); Carrithers (1983: ch. 4); Masefield (1986); Lindtner (1997); and Hamilton (1996, 2003: esp. pp. 54–56). These studies each put forward creative and even enlightening readings of the Pāli texts, but they highlight philosophical or narrative elements regarding what they consider to be the central purport of the early Buddhist teachings while they exclude *jhānic* meditation from the spotlight.

[17] In the context of the history of ideas, Gombrich displays acute sensitivity in unearthing the connections between Buddhist thought and the Indian philosophical context in which it sprouted and matured, be it Brahmanical and Upaniṣadic, or Jain. This may be seen as the main contribution of his study. See, for example, the discussion of the *Tevijja-sutta* in chapter 6 and the discussion of the simile of fire in chapter 8.

the lack of attention devoted to meditation in Gombrich's book is vexing since he himself supplied the most compelling account of the way in which "insight worsted concentration" in early Buddhist spiritual culture. In this important publication, Gombrich (1996: ch. 4) convincingly argued that enlightenment was not originally conceived to be possible without *samādhi* meditation and that it was only later that monks began to contemplate a spiritual option of "release [only] through wisdom" (*paññā-vimutti*). Gombrich's near dismissal of meditation is also odd because *What the Buddha Thought* offers what may be the most forceful articulation of the position that parts of the Pāli Canon can be relied on as historical documents (Chapter 7). Gombrich recommends a critical reliance on the texts, yet any presentation of the Buddha's thought that is based on these texts must take into account that the awakening to the reality of Buddhist truth is said to take place in deep meditation. Ultimately, the disregard of meditative praxis remains a shortcoming in Gombrich's effort at a historical presentation of the Buddha's thought.

The second dominant scholarly approach to the early Buddhist path to liberation stresses *samādhi* meditation at the expense of philosophical truth. Studies such as Paul Griffiths (1981; 1983; 1986), Tilmann Vetter (1988), Alexander Wynne (2007), and Johannes Bronkhorst (2009) all display inspiring historical sensitivity in emphasizing the centrality of meditative *jhānic* states in the context of the early Buddhist path to awakening.[18] Not only do these scholars emphasize *jhāna*, but they go so far as to view liberation as the experience of *jhāna* itself (or of other forms of deep *samādhi*).[19] Thus, they suppose not only that philosophy and knowledge are unable to contribute to these experiences but that philosophy is inherently alien to the meditative experiences described by the texts. These scholars read the textual descriptions of *jhāna* in a way that allows for no conceptual content, perhaps even for no cognitive content whatsoever. Such an understanding is articulated in exceptional force with regard to the state called "the cessation of perception and feeling" (*saññāvedayita-nirodha*), which is normally said to follow such placid states as the "base of nothingness" (*ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ*) and "the base of neither perception

[18] See also Rhys Davids (1978 [1928]: esp. ch. IX); Norman (1997: 29–33); Cousins (1973, 1996); Gethin (2001 [1992]: 344–350); Anālayo (2003: ch. 4, esp. 88–91); Sujato (2006); Kuan (2008); Samuel (2006: ch. 6, esp. 136–39); Brahmāli (2009).

[19] Among these scholars, Bronkhorst and Vetter emphasize the fourth *jhāna*, Wynne focuses on the formless attainments of "the base of nothingness" and "the base of neither perception nor non-perception," and Griffiths focuses on the state of "cessation." Harvey (1995: ch. 10–12) emphasizes the concept of cessation in the understanding of early Buddhist theories of liberation as well.

nor non-perception" (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ*). It is thus argued that the claim made by the texts that philosophy operates in such quiet states results from later commentarial and dogmatic manipulations. The texts speak of philosophy, these scholars maintain, since they face intense competition on the Indian philosophical debate ground. Or, the redactors of the texts were influenced by the widespread Indian attribution of power to knowledge. Finally, it is surmised that the Buddhist community made an effort to structure itself from within by distinguishing itself through a shared philosophy.

Johaness Bronkhorst's *Buddhist Teachings in India* exemplifies this tendency to alienate *samādhi* from philosophy. To Bronkhorst, it is clear that "the interest of the early Buddhists in some form of liberating knowledge can be easily explained with reference to the religious milieu of the time" (p. 33). Bronkhorst is thus convinced that the possibility of attaining liberation through "liberating insight" betrays an incorporation of non-Buddhist values into the Buddhist tradition.[20] Leading up to his analysis of the Buddhist notions of liberation, Bronkhorst mentions a number of *Brāhmaṇa* passages that evidence the power attributed to knowledge in the Indian traditions that predate the Buddha. Bronkhorst is also impressed by the apparent divisions among Buddhists regarding the nature and content of liberating knowledge since the texts provide contradictory characterizations of both the path and of its summit (pp. 30–31). Finally, Bronkhorst derives much from the fact that the earlier versions of what is considered to be the Buddha's first sermon (the DCP) make no mention of the four noble truths.[21]

Bronkhorst's observations regarding the deep relationships between Buddhism and its surrounding spiritual milieu as well as his insights into the heterogeneity of the early Buddhist tradition are illuminating. It is also beyond doubt that ancient Indian religions and systems of thought displayed a keen interest in knowledge and viewed it as transformative.[22] But surely, this does not imply that knowledge was not integral to the earlier developmental stages of Buddhism. It would actually make better

[20] The notion that Buddhism borrowed elements from rival spiritual traditions is central to Bronkhorst's thinking on early Buddhism. See his discussion of the adoption of Jain principles regarding the understanding of action and liberation in Bronkhorst (1995). In Bronkhorst (1993: ch. 7), he uses this same principle in order to explain the existence of the formless *samādhis* and *nirodha-samāpatti* in the early Buddhist texts.

[21] See section 4.6 below for my appraisal of this problem.

[22] As is seen by the common Upaniṣadic statement that attributes power and mastery to "him who knows thus" (*ya evaṃ veda*, for example, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* 1.4.10).

sense if the great success of the Buddhist tradition resulted from its unique, organic reworking of this pan-Indian concern.

The main reason that Bronkhorst believes liberating insight could not have been an integral component of the original process of awakening is that the texts state that such knowledge takes place in meditation. He continues the claim cited above that "the interest of the early Buddhists in some form of liberating knowledge can be easily explained with reference to the religious milieu of the time" by saying that:

> The vacillating attitude of the texts with regard to the exact content of this [liberating] knowledge gives rise to the suspicion that the early Buddhist tradition had little or nothing to offer in this respect. That would not be surprising. In the above quoted description of the path to liberation,[23] a number of meditative, one might say mystical, states are depicted that precede the liberating knowledge; this knowledge is therefore attained in such a state. It is however known that mystical states cannot always be accurately described in words. Perhaps the oldest tradition did not talk about a liberating knowledge at all, or if it did, it talked about a knowledge without specifying its content. (p. 33)

For Bronkhorst, the characterization of the meditative states in which knowledge is said to arise as "mystical" precludes the possibility that the reference to knowledge is authentic. These so-called "mystical" states are "known" not to be captured by language, and therefore any reference to liberating knowledge appears out of place. But this understanding of "mystical experience" is heavily influenced by the common and predominantly Western associations, which regard mystical events as beyond the grasp of words. If "mystical" necessarily means "beyond words," and if the Buddhist texts believe that meditative experience can be characterized by words – albeit not always by the same words – it seems natural to conclude that the term "mystical" may not apply. No less importantly, just as a Christian monk knows that he experiences or experienced an encounter with the Godhead even though his vision was "mystical," or the Sufi saint feels union with Allah and never speaks of the Zen-Buddhist's "original-mind," so can a Buddhist monk relate to the truths of his tradition in meditative trance. In both cases the relationship between the "experience" and its verbal account is not easy to decipher, but this does not imply that the latter is arbitrary and does not relate to the experience

[23] It is not fully clear to me which of the "descriptions of the path to liberation" quoted by Bronkhorst earlier in his text is being referred to here. In any case, the specific identity of the passage is unessential to the argument, and it surely applies to the standard description of the process of liberation we will soon analyze.

itself. In the Buddhist context, the content of "knowledge" or "insight" may not necessarily be verbal during the experience, but it may nevertheless be expressed in words following the experience, or possibly even during the experience itself, given that the verbal content is minimal or that it is internalized after continuous engagement; in this sense we may think of a noting that is not fully verbal but that nevertheless corresponds with the verbal definition that is formulized after the meditation and contemplated before it.

We are thus in need of a minimalist definition for Buddhist philosophical vision in *samādhi* that we would be able to accept as part of the meditative experience itself. We also must search for an understanding regarding the processes by which Buddhist philosophical knowledge is internalized. Our goal is, ultimately, to understand *Buddhist philosophical perception*. In the following chapters, I will argue that such a skeletal philosophical vision is exactly what the central articulations of the doctrines of the four noble truths (Chapter 4) and of dependent-origination (Chapter 2.3) offer us and that the traditional method of *satipaṭṭhāna* ("mindfulness") meditation describes the way knowledge is internalized (Chapter 3).

Before proceeding, it is worth reflecting briefly on the common notion that the ultimate religious vision must be "ineffable." We must ask ourselves if the much more common experience of, say, eating an orange, is "effable" in any true sense. It should be clear that this experience is never, and possibly in principle may never be, fully captured by its verbal description. We might mention the richness and inherently particular context of each bite and its diverse faces, including the experiences in each of the senses, the conceptual or emotional states operating in the mind at the time, both conscious and unconscious, and so forth. To this we may add the consideration that we can only express, possibly even only think of, what our language allows us to express and reflect on. The mere fact that there are many chemical reactions that contribute to our familiar experience of eating an orange already attests that there are aspects of such an experience beyond what language can convey. More important, there are many shades of experience between available appraisals like "pleasant" and "unpleasant" while there is a fundamental, fuzzy vagueness in evaluations such as "nice" or "tasty." Indeed, if we could experience the full cognitive gamut of eating an orange, that experience in itself would have to be classed as "mystical."[24]

[24] One may recall Aldous Huxley's famous descriptions in *The Doors of Perception*.

Surely much can be said about eating an orange, but in an important sense this mundane experience must be thought not to be conveyed by language, probably in a similar degree to so-called "ineffable" or "mystical" religious experiences. This observation does not deny that religious, mystical experiences are more profound and significant than eating an orange. But a strong notion of "ineffability" as a label for "mystical" experience is in need of proof. Obviously, if the mystics who experienced such states could not characterize them in meaningful language – including calling them "ineffable" – we would never have developed an interest in them.[25]

Note that these last remarks go beyond the famous debate between the perennial and constructivist understandings of religious experience.[26] Here we are not saying only that every experience, including "mystical experience," is conditioned by cultural, specifically linguistic, constructions. Rather, the point I am making is that on some level all experiences transcend these forms of understanding. Thus, if eating an orange is marked by "perennial" elements, the notion of a "perennial truth" becomes somewhat shaky. Returning to our discussion of Bronkhorst's appraisal of the Buddha's liberating knowledge, we can now suggest that, at least to some extent, these experiences have content, and therefore that this content can be described, at least to a degree, in words. Surely they are not only about words, but there is nothing wrong with words informing, possibly even conditioning, them. In fact, the profound sense of truth that accompanies these states itself suggests that they involve some perception of philosophical truth. Furthermore, we may surmise that the intense sense of meaningfulness aroused by these experiences is part of the reason that they are expressed in different ways, since words can only go a certain way. To some extent, the different presentations of philosophical wisdom in the texts may thus be seen as a strength, rather than as a weakness.

It seems reasonable that the distinct articulations of these Buddhist "mystical" experiences are expressions of different aspects of the same experience.[27] Just as we can say that an orange smelled or tasted *both* sweet

[25] For further reflections on this theme, see Matilal (1990: Appendix 1). Matilal sees the theory regarding the ineffability of mystical experience as "a warning against the trivialization of the language of the mystics" (p. 151).

[26] See Forman (1990: esp. Introduction) for a presentation of this question and his debate with the structuralist position of Katz (1978). For further reflections on this theme, see Sharf (2000).

[27] Gombrich (1990: 5–11) has presented an interesting criticism of the discrepancies identified in Buddhist texts and specifically regarding the descriptions of religious experiences. Gombrich emphasizes the difficulty in offering a verbal encapsulation of an overwhelming experience in a language that had yet to encounter such an experience. He goes on to suggest that a view of coherence in the texts is largely in the eye of the beholder, and he emphasizes the very fact that the

and sour, both pleasant and pungent, the experience of liberating knowledge can be explained along the lines of the doctrines of the four (noble) truths, of the destruction of the *āsavas* ("inflows," see below), of the reality of non-self, or of dependent-origination. A main concern of this book will be to show how these different philosophical positions relate to each other and to illustrate their relation to the same core meditative experiences. Furthermore, these experiences can be defined in minimalist terms as a specific vision or perception that is generated in the mind of the advanced practitioner who has entered concentrated meditation. It was these meditative experiences that later grew to become Buddhist philosophy.

Bronkhorst points to a basic incongruence regarding the Buddhist description of liberating insight, following in the footsteps of de la Vallée Poussin's seminal 1936–7 article, *Musīla et Nārada*.[28] In some cases, liberating insight is said to occur in meditative trance while in others it functions only through a theoretical grasp of the teaching. This second option is normally connected to events in which the Buddha teaches the doctrine of non-selfhood. Bronkhorst thus believes that the presentation of the doctrine of non-self as a form of liberating insight is a clear borrowing from non-Buddhist traditions, in this case the "mirror-image" of the insights of these traditions regarding the reality of the Self (p. 36).[29] Bronkhorst is thus strengthened in his inclination to view all forms of liberating insight as a Buddhist adoption of non-Buddhist influences since he is certain that the statement that liberating insight rises in a mystical state is a fraud.

The problem regarding the relationship between a wisdom that possesses distinct conceptual content and meditative states of consciousness that are said to be beyond conceptuality is a real one. As Bronkhorst states, "It makes a great deal of difference whether enlightenment is only to be found in the solitude of the forest, in a mystical state induced by meditation exercises, or alternatively, by means of the attainment of certain knowledges, possibly in the company of others" (p. 35). Nevertheless, although liberating insight can be said to take place outside *samādhi*, this

Buddhist tradition seems to have deemed the descriptions reasonable. Gombrich wonders whether the first verse of St. John's gospel, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" implies that St. John "must go to the back of the class?" (p. 11).

28 De la Vallée Poussin's argument in *Musīla et Nārada* has been criticized convincingly by Gombrich (1996: ch. 4). See also Gomez (1999) who believes (p. 693) that La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Edgerton (1924). Deleanu (2000: 75ff.) invokes the problems defined by La Vallée Poussin in a forceful and interesting way, focusing on *Prajñāpāramitā* traditions.

29 See also Bronkhorst's (1995: esp. 344–45) remarks on the close relationship between the realizations of Self and non-Self.

surely does not imply that the instances when it is said to arise in *samādhi* are not authentic. In fact, once the plausibility of insight occurring in deep meditation is established we will be in a better position to grasp the significance of the descriptions of enlightenment that occur outside meditation. Then we will be able to see that the context of *samādhi* is assumed or that the insight afforded by a discovery of Buddhist truth outside *samādhi* is a less profound occurrence of a similar realization that occurs in the adept's meditation.

We now turn to analyze the central theory of liberation in the Pāli discourses.

1.1 The standard description of liberation

We may now direct our attention to the central theory of enlightenment in the early Buddhist texts. This theory was defined by Schmithausen (1981: 204) as "the stereotyped detailed description of the Path of Liberation," a definition accepted also by Bronkhorst (1993: 102).[30] Schmithausen's analysis of the diverse descriptions of the path of liberation, and specifically of the contents of "liberating insight," is fundamental to the present inquiry into the nature of Buddhist philosophy as meditative perception. The early Buddhist texts abound with varied descriptions regarding the nature of the enlightenment experience, and the accounts plainly contradict each other. Schmithausen sifts the different approaches and molds an authoritative account of the way they relate to each other. He thus sees the description of enlightenment that speaks of the sequential arising of three forms of knowledge (*ñāṇa*) in the fourth *jhāna* as the central account of liberation in the Nikāyas. One of the main goals of this study is to unravel the ideas that are at the root of this particular theory of enlightenment.

An important caveat must be made at this point. No one theory can capture all the approaches to awakening in the early Buddhist texts. As argued by Bronkhorst, there are different and conflicting descriptions of awakening in the Pāli discourses. Most of these descriptions state that awakening takes place in a state of deep meditation, but these presentations are themselves in disagreement regarding the precise character of the meditative states they prescribe; the differences can be said to relate to the degree in which the state is said to be beyond ideation. The question

30 Wynne (2007: 94): "His (the Buddha's) awakening came to be conceptualized in early Buddhist circles in terms of the attainment of the four *jhāna-s* and the liberating insight to which they lead." See also Norman (1997: 29).

then arises whether these states allow for verbal or cognitive content and thus if they should be considered as accounts that relate to the time after the practitioner arises from his meditation. It is also possible to understand these meditative attainments as liberating in the sense that they approximate the state the adept attains when he dies. Paradigmatic of this last approach is liberation in the state of "cessation of perception and feeling" (*saññāvedayitanirodha*, termed also "the attainment of cessation," *nirodhasamāpatti*, hereafter "cessation").[31] Still other texts speak of an intellectually-oriented liberation without meditation.[32]

Clearly, the texts convey a plethora of opinions regarding enlightenment. Nevertheless, in deciding where to place our emphasis we may not be in as dire a position as the ardent skeptic would make us believe we are. First, while some texts speak of liberation without explicitly mentioning meditation, nowhere that I am aware of is the suggestion made that the Buddha achieved awakening through the intellectually-oriented approach that involves no meditation. Statements of this sort are reserved for descriptions of liberation achieved by the Buddha's disciples, who at times reach liberation while, or immediately after, they hear his teachings.[33] Such an approach to liberation may be viewed as a less rich and complete version than the one achieved in meditation by the Buddha.[34] Another way

[31] In calling *saññā-vedayita-nirodha* "the cessation of perception and feeling," I employ the common translation in scholarly discussion, which follows statements such as SN IV.218 or AN 9.31: "For one who has attained *saññāvedayitanirodha*, perceptions and feelings (*vedanā*) have fully ceased" (*saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samāpannassa saññā ca vedanā ca niruddhā honti*). Nevertheless, the translation of *vedayita* as "feeling" may be misleading. *Vedayita* can refer to sensation, or literally to "what has been be felt." But it may be significant that the term *vedayita* was chosen in this context, rather than the more common *vedanā* or *vedita*. *Vedayita* can also relate to an object of knowledge as it is the past passive participle of the causative *vedeti* – to sense or to make known. It may be suggested that the objects of feelings are referred to as *vedita* and not *vedayita* (for example, SN IV.205) and that the latter is reserved for a more cognitive meaning. This question pertains to the broader one regarding the possibility of different interpretations for the state of cessation which may have existed in the early Buddhist tradition itself. See section 1.2.

[32] Bronkhorst (2009: 34); Schmithausen (1981: 219).

[33] The near-instant realization produced by the hearing of the inspired utterance of the Buddha is central to Masefield's (1986) intriguing approach. Echoing Masefield, in the terms of this study, it may be suggested that the aura of the Buddha could, for certain students, replace the need to develop *samādhi* meditation in order to achieve awakening.

[34] Schmithausen (1981: 220–22) questions how it is that some passages in which "liberating insight [is] being described as the contemplation or insight into the *negative* nature of existence or its basic factors (as, e.g., the five Skandhas), especially into Impermanence, Disagreeableness and Not-being-the-Self . . . do not indicate that meditative concentration is required, that in some of them it – or at least the entrance into the fourth, or even any, *dhyāna* – seems even to be precluded by the context." He contemplates De La Vallée Poussin's suggestion that it is because the *jhānas* "were accessible only to a minority of monks" and thus "their indispensability would have precluded the majority from attaining liberation." Then he raises another possible interpretation that "Enlightenment as a

to view these descriptions, at least in certain cases, is to suppose that the context of *samādhi* is implied.[35] Furthermore, the intellectualist line of understanding enlightenment has long been suspected as being a later strand of religious thought and praxis that did not apply to the earliest Buddhist teachings.[36] It thus seems reasonable to concentrate first on the descriptions of enlightenment that speak of the arising of philosophical vision *in* meditation, which is a defining feature of most of the approaches to liberation in the Pāli texts. Among these, the theory of the three forms of knowledge in the fourth *jhāna* is clearly the one that was favored by the authors of the early discourses.

The emphasis on the theory of liberation through the three understandings that arise in the fourth *jhāna* is supported by one major justification: in all but one of the cases in which the Buddha speaks "autobiographically" about his own enlightenment, this is the theory he employs.[37] As a literary fact, this attests to the great value attributed to this theory. Furthermore, aside from the great prestige attributed to the fourth *jhāna* in the texts, it is also highlighted in the tale of the Buddha's death, as it is related by the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. This text has the Buddha go through an authorized list of nine *samādhi* states in ascending and descending order and then proceeds again to the fourth *jhāna* from which he departs from this world.[38]

first discovery, or at least experiential confirmation of the soteriologically relevant truths, may require the fourth Dhyāna frequently associated with supernatural faculties; but in the case of the Liberating Insight of Disciples . . . such supranormal mental faculties, as well as the extraordinary level of meditative absorption presupposed for their attainment, could easily come to be regarded as unnecessary."

35 Vetter (1988: xxix–xxxii); Wynne (2007: 102–8); Anālayo (2009: 156–59).

36 See the references to Schmithausen (1981) in note 34 above and to Vetter (1988) and Wynne (2007) in the previous note, as well as the discussion from Bronkhorst (2009) in the previous section of this chapter. See also Gombrich (1996: ch. 4).

37 I employ the term "autobiographical" in the sense that in these discourses, the Buddha, as a literary figure, speaks of his own enlightenment in the first person voice. Bareau (1963: 72–91) sees the autobiographical account of enlightenment in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* (APS, MN 26; Bareau also refers to the Sarvāstivādin equivalent of this text) as earlier than the ones we will focus on here. Another relevant autobiographical account appears in the DCP. The relationship between the presentation of enlightenment in both these texts – the other first-person descriptions of enlightenment in the early discourses – and the more common one we will focus on here will be reflected on in section 4.5 below. It must also be remembered that these "autobiographical" accounts of awakening are not only descriptions or theories of liberation that carry primary doctrinal importance, but also part of biographies of the Buddha that served different functions in the imagined world of the early Buddhist community. See Reynolds and Hallisey (1987: esp. 323–25); Schober (1997: 1–5).

38 DN II.156. For further reflections on the unique significance of the fourth *jhāna*, see Gethin (1997: 201–4). See also Stuart-Fox (1989) and Bucknell (1993) for further studies on the *jhānas*.

The textual passage I rely on here – and there are interesting variations[39] – is taken from the *Bhayabherava-sutta* of the *Majjhima*

[39] For different versions of this same description of enlightenment from the canons of other Buddhist traditions, see Bareau (1963: 75–79); it is important to notice that these descriptions are remarkably similar to each other. The most common variation on the standard description is when it is lengthened to include the arising of five "realizations" *(abhiññā)*, which involve mainly the attainment of supernatural powers between the attainment of the four *jhānas* and the arising of the three forms of knowledge. The paradigmatic version of this is the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* of the DN (DN 2, I.76–80), which recurs in most *suttas* in the first division of the DN.

There are many other important formulations that are reminiscent of the central theory but that diverge from it in interesting ways. These differences usually concern the specific type of meditative absorption in which liberating experience is said to take place or the precise description of the moment of insight (or its absence). The very fact that such divergences exist points to the possibility that there was extensive theorizing on the nature of liberating realization and thus that the theories we read today were eventually given prominence for some reason or another. These variations should not be taken as an impediment, however, since the vast majority of approaches maintain the basic, structural relationship between *samādhi* meditation and realization through wisdom. Many of these passages should thus be seen as offshoots of the central theory of knowledge in the fourth *jhāna* or as corrupted versions of it, or even as earlier versions that employ the same logic. Since a detailed analysis of all relevant passages is not possible here, I present only a preliminary list of the most interesting passages worthy of consideration:

(1) MN 52 (I.350–353, equal to AN 11.16) speaks of the destruction of the inflows as occurring in all eleven states of the four *jhānas*, the four *brahmavihāras*, and the first three formless attainments, following the perception of the conditioned and impermanent nature of these states. The text continues to mention another possible attainment if the destruction of the inflows is not achieved, which consists of the achievement of "non-returning." Similar to this text is MN 64 (I.435–437, quoted on p. 37), which also raises both these options for liberation, saying that in order to achieve the destruction of the inflows one has to notice the impermanent and conditioned nature of each meditative state and to turn his mind to "the deathless element" (*amatadhātu*). This turning to "the deathless element" may hint at a perception of liberation that is closer to the one attained in cessation. See Schmithausen (1981: sections H and J) for a discussion of these two discourses, and see section 1.2 below for a suggestion of their relationship to the fourth *jhāna*. See also the *Jhāna-sutta* of the AN (9.36), which uses the same textual formula as MN 64 regarding the first seven *samādhis*, consciously not applying it to the last two states that are beyond perception while still stating the "the destruction of the inflows is based on them" (see also Schmithausen [1981: section K].

(2) At SN IV.262–69, Mahāmoggallāna relates how he had trouble maintaining each of the nine *samādhis* – an important statement in itself that suggests that these meditative states are not stable – after which he received guidance from the Buddha through his supernatural power (*iddhi*). Mahāmoggallāna then defines himself as "a student that has attained great realization (*mahā-abhiññā*) through the help of the teacher (*satthārānuggahīto sāvako mahābhiññataṃ patto*)," a statement that identifies between realization and the secure attainment of the *samādhi* states themselves. A similar case occurs at SN II.273, referring only to the second *jhāna*.

(3) A number of passages from the *Vedanā-saṃyutta* express diverse perceptions regarding the nature of *jhāna*; these tend to present *samādhi* as "pleasant abidings" (*sukhavihāra*) that do not involve wisdom. For example, SN IV.217–18 speaks of the destruction of the inflows, apparently in cessation, without mentioning any element of knowledge or wisdom. SN IV.225–28 also makes no mention of wisdom while seeing the nine *samādhi* states as forms of supreme happiness. SN IV.236–37 speaks of liberation from lust, hatred and delusion, again with no mention of wisdom or of the *āsavas*. See also MN 8 (esp. I.40–42) in which the four *jhānas* and

Nikāya,[40] in which the Buddha supplies an account of his awakening in the first person singular.[41] His narration follows an explanation of how he overcame the "fear and dread" that were troubling his concentration in the forest by maintaining a completely positive state of mind and then diligently defeating fear and dread as they arose in his mind. The soon-to-be-Buddha then reached a state he characterizes in the following way: "Brahmin, my energy was dense and unwavering, my mindfulness[42] established and collected,[43] my body calm and composed, and my mind concentrated and one-pointed."[44] This states that his mind entered *samādhi* and had become concentrated, or more literally "had become *samādhi*ed and one-pointed" (*samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ*). The degree of concentration will now intensify as the Buddha explains in the conventionalized language of the text how he went through four

four formless attainments are said to be "pleasant abidings here and now" (Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi [1995: 123]).

(4) Of special interest is SN II.210–214 in which the Buddha mentions his and Kassapa's ability to enter the nine *samādhi* states and to control four of the five realizations that appear in the lengthened version of "the stereotyped detailed description of the Path of Liberation" as well as the three understandings in the central description of liberation. Remarkably, in this text, in the description of the final knowledge that is equal to the third and crucial knowledge of the destruction of the inflows, the knowledge of the 4NTs is omitted and a different terminology is used to describe the destruction of the inflows than the regular one that is modeled on the 4NTs. See also MN 77 (II.22).

It is important to note that this text from the SN raises some doubt regarding Schmithausen's (1981: 204n15) important observation that "the stereotyped detailed description of the Path of Liberation" is absent from the SN. This observation leads him to suggest that "this seems to indicate that the monks specializing in a certain Nikāya may also have formed a (more or less coherent) group with certain doctrinal (or spiritual) predilections." Here we clearly have a version of "the stereotyped detailed description of the Path of Liberation."

40 MN 4. For a translation of a Chinese version of this text from the *Ekottarika-āgama* and a comparison between the two versions, see Anālayo (2011b).

41 Additional instances in which the Buddha relates the same text "autobiographically" are MN 19, 36, 100, and AN 8.11. In other texts the Buddha narrates a similar version of the same text in a way that implies that he is speaking of his personal experience; see DN 2, MN 27 (in which the Buddha speaks of these realizations as "the Tathāgata's footprint"), MN 51, MN 77, SN II.210–213 (see in note 41 above under [4]), and AN 3.59 and 3.60. We thus have texts from all four Nikāyas that introduce the theory of enlightenment as centered on the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows in the fourth *jhāna* and as an account of the Buddha's own enlightenment, although the versions from the DN and the SN are different in certain respects.

42 *Sati*, translated here according to the accepted meaning "mindfulness," is discussed extensively in Chapter 3.

43 *Asammuṭṭhā* is the negation of the past passive participle of *mussati* (to forget, Skt. *mṛṣati*). *Sammuṭṭhā* can therefore mean "mindless" or "careless," and hence *asammuṭṭhā* should mean "collected."

44 *Āraddhaṃ kho pana me, brāhmaṇa, vīriyaṃ ahosi asallīnaṃ, upaṭṭhitā sati asammuṭṭhā, passaddho kāyo asāraddho, samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ*.

Pāli quotations are taken from the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition of the Vipassana Research Institute. At times, the texts have been slightly edited. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

stages of *jhānic* concentration, and how in the fourth of them,[45] three forms of knowledge arose. First, we read the description of the four *jhānas* themselves:

> Then, Brahmin, when I was separated indeed from passions, separated from unhealthy mental occurrences,[46] I entered into and abided in the first *jhāna*, in which thought and analysis take place, which is born of separ ation[47] and characterized by pleasure and joy.[48]
>
> Following the quieting of thought and analysis, I entered upon and abided in the second *jhāna*, which is the inner serenity of mind that is unified, devoid of thought and analysis, born of concentration, and charac terized by pleasure and joy.
>
> Following the fading away of joy[49], I abided equanimious, mindful and aware and experienced pleasure with the body; I entered and abided in the third *jhāna*, which the noble ones describe thus: "he is equanimious, mindful and has a pleasant abiding."
>
> Following the abandonment of [bodily] pleasure and pain, and following the earlier passing away of mental pleasure and pain,[50] I entered and abided

[45] Schmithausen (1981: 216) speaks explicitly of the three understandings arising *in* the fourth *jhāna*, and I am inclined to agree with him that this is what the texts say. But it is also possible that the understandings arise after the emergence from *jhāna*. Anālayo (personal communication) believes that the passage should be read as implying that the mind that has attained the fourth *jhāna* then exits *jhāna*, and while remaining in a *samādhi* state that is similar but not equal to *jhāna*, awakens to the three types of knowledge. I accept that Anālayo's understanding may make theoretical sense, but I do not believe that so much can be read into the text. The short passage between the description of the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* and the arising of the three understandings – *so evaṃ samāhite citte* ("then when my concentrated mind was..." see below) – clearly states that the mind is in *samādhi*. The *so evaṃ* – being thus" – suggests that what is now being described is happening in the state just described, i.e. in the fourth *jhāna*.

[46] *Dhamma* ("mental occurences," here in the plural) is a term that has received ample scholarly discussion (for example, Ronkin [2002] and Gethin [2004; 2005]). I understand it to imply, in the present context, a mental event, possibly a "cognitive moment," and hence to refer both to cognition and to its contents. Terms often used to translate *dhammā*, such as "mental objects" or "mental phenomena," are misleading – the first since the reference is to mental states in general and not necessarily to mental objects; the second, although not mistaken, is too vague.

[47] "Separation" translates *viveka* (and "separated" the gerund *vivicca*), a term that characterizes both the means and the end of the early Buddhist meditative ideal. (See for instance SNip 822 that defines *viveka* as "the highest for the noble ones" [*ariyānam uttamam*]). The term implies different levels of detachment from sensual pleasures or even from sensual experience. Compare *Yoga-sūtra* 2.16.

[48] "Joy," *pīti*, is an important part of the process by which the mind enters into and abides in *samādhi*, but it is ultimately to be transcended. For important characterization of its functioning, see AN 3.96 and Gethin (2001 [1992]: 154–55).

[49] *Virāga*, literally "the lack of desire," here appears in the meaning of "fading away" in the sense of losing color (*rāga*); joy fades away and the mind enters a deeper state of *jhāna*. See Anālayo (2009: 36–43) for a discussion of this term. A reading of *virāga* as "the absence of desire" may also be appropriate.

[50] "Abandonment" (*pahāna*) must refer to bodily *dukkha* and *sukha* since in the third *jhāna sukha* experienced "by the body" (*kāyena*) was described. Also, immediately comes a statement regarding

in the fourth *jhāna*, in which there is no pleasure and pain and which is characterized by equanimity, mindfulness and purity.[51]

Although many questions could surely be raised about this passage, and the description is terse, much is also expressed quite clearly. The Buddha states explicitly that for him states of *jhāna* are distinct from normal cognition, transcending substantial levels of what may be considered the basic structuring of the normal waking mind – conceptuality and sensations of pleasure and pain. The mind is in an unusual, serenely deep, and quiet mode of operation. At the same time, these states are evidently cognitive; among the intellectual functions of the mind said to subside in the *jhānas*, the text mentions only *vitakka* and *vicāra*, translated here as "thought and analysis." Although there is no, and probably cannot be, any final agreement regarding the precise cognitive functions these terms convey, it appears quite clear that they do not cover the whole gamut of human understanding.[52] A stronger reading of these terms would see states without them as fully beyond conceptuality and any application of verbal reflection, but it remains questionable that such an interpretation is in order. A more cautious reading of the texts at this point would recognize that these states may not be thoroughly "non-conceptual," and that some degree of conceptual noting and of verbal apprehension may still take place. No statement is made regarding the stopping of perceptions (*saññā*)

"the (earlier) passing away of mental pleasure and pain (*somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgama*)," or more literally "of a good or bad mind."

[51] MN I.21-22: *So kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. Vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhattaṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. Pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca vihāsiṃ, sato ca sampajāno sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedesiṃ; yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti – 'upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī'ti tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham asukham upekkhāsatipārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ.*

[52] The vexing problem regarding the precise nature of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in this context – translated here as "thought and analysis" – is probably insoluble. It is the quieting of these functions that teaches us that *jhāna* surpasses conceptuality, but we do not know precisely what forms of conceptuality are included by the choice of these particular terms. In a general sense, it seems clear that *vittakka* and *vicāra* imply an active use of language, reasoning, and possibly of conceptual thought. While it is possible that these terms should be reserved for a more technical application of reasoning and active conceptual analysis, the PED says (p. 620): "Looking at the combination vitakka + vicāra in earlier and later works one comes to the conclusion that they were once used to denote one and the same thing: just thought, thinking, only in an emphatic way (as they are also semantically synonymous)." For an excellent analysis of *vitakka*, see Johansson (1979: 185–90), and of both terms see Cousins (1992). See also Anālayo (2003: 75–79), who argues compellingly that the first *jhāna* is already beyond regular forms of thinking and that *vitakka* and *vicāra* "refer to the initial and sustained application of attention" (p. 78).

or of consciousness (*viññāṇa*, *citta*) and, as the text will soon show, it does believe that "knowledge" (*ñāṇa*) can arise in them. This knowledge, though, cannot be an elaborate conceptual or philosophical one since these would be included in *vitakka* and *vicāra*.

The fourth *jhāna* is described as a deeply cleansed and balanced state of mind characterized by "mindfulness." It is in this cleansed, balanced, and mindful mind that three forms of knowledge arise, one in each of the three consecutive watches of the night that led the Buddha to the understanding that he had attained liberation.[53]

The three knowledge-events can be seen as different perceptual resolutions of the same realization regarding the truth of conditionality.[54] The first knowledge consists of a vision into the Buddha's own process of transmigration between lives: "Then, when my concentrated mind was pure, clean, untarnished, free of defilements, supple, workable, steady, beyond vacillation, I directed the mind to the knowledge which consists of the recollection of former births."[55] Here the Buddha narrates that he "recollected many former births," ranging from one birth through one hundred thousand births across many ages of world expansion and contraction. Regarding each one of these births he recollects: "There I had this name, I was of this clan, of this social status, this was my food, I experienced this pleasure and pain, I lived to this extent, and moving on from there I appeared there. There too, I had this name."[56] The Buddha then ends this statement on the "knowledge of the recollection of former births" with a formalized description of the way ignorance and darkness were replaced by knowledge and light.

[53] To some students of Buddhism, the argument that philosophy can participate in *jhāna* will appear unfeasible; they would probably prefer to see the experiences of "wisdom" as part of the post-*jhānic* experience. Venerable Anālayo (personal communication), for example, suggests that the texts should not be read to say that wisdom arises *in* the fourth *jhāna*, but rather in a related *samādhi* state. Although I can easily see the logic of such a position, I believe the texts are thoroughly unambiguous on this point. I believe that my approach is consistent with the understanding of *jhāna* as discussed by Gethin (2001 [1992]: 344–50).

[54] See also Anālayo (2008: 91–93). The position that the first two understandings, which contain supernatural visions of the processes of rebirth and correspond to the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows in the third knowledge, resonates well with the overall approach in Gethin (1997). Gethin speaks of the correspondence between Buddhist psychological and mythological or cosmological insights so that ideas about rebirth or cosmology "represent a concretized and mythic counterpart to the more abstract formulation of, say, dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)" (p. 188).

[55] MN I.22: *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesiṃ.*

[56] MN I.22: *Amutrāsiṃ evaṃnāmo evaṃgotto evaṃvaṇṇo evamāhāro evaṃsukhadukkhappatisamvedī evamāyupariyanto, so tato cuto amutra udapādiṃ. Tatrāpāsiṃ evaṃnāmo.*

As is often true with early Buddhist texts, the case seems to be somewhat overstated. Even on purely technical grounds, it appears unreasonable that the Buddha could manage to view such an endless number of specific details during the first watch of the night, that is in more or less four hours. No less important, the perception of these previous lives appears to be more elaborate than the definition of the Buddha's meditative state allows for. Possibly, we can imagine some aspects of the description of former lives to be no more than a momentary non-conceptual vision; others – "My name was such, my clan such, my social status such" – appear to demand verbal efforts. But the elaborate content of the first knowledge should not prevent us from sensing that a powerful vision had occurred in which the Buddha – as he was envisioned by the authors and redactors of these texts – at least imagined many of his previous births and felt this imagination to be hyper-real. More important, we can appreciate the understanding that is at the base of this realization: the first knowledge involves a perception regarding the way personal continuity functions; in this case, the Buddha understands the mechanics of his own private history of conditioning.[57]

The second knowledge involves a similar realization. Again, the Buddha repeats the description of his concentrated, steady, and purified mind, and then says that "I directed the mind to the knowledge of the passing and arising of beings."[58] Here he states how:

> With the purified divine eye that surpasses the human eye, I saw beings dying and being born, lowly or exalted, of a high social status or low social status,[59] in a good rebirth or a bad rebirth.[60] I knew beings moving along according to their actions: these beings, sir, who pursued bad conduct of the body, who pursued bad conduct of speech, who pursued bad conduct of mind, who scorned the noble ones, who had wrong views and took on actions based on wrong views; they, following the dissolution of the body, after death, reached a state of loss, a bad rebirth, a fallen state, a hell. And

[57] For a penetrating reading of the significance and role of the knowledge of former births, see Lopez (1992), who sees this textual presentation as an authentication of the Buddhist view of reality, that is of the world as the karmic play of *saṃsāra*.

[58] MN I.22: *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte sattānaṃ cutūpapātañāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesiṃ*.

[59] *Suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe*, literally of good and bad color, or of "good" and "bad" status. *Vaṇṇa* (Skt. *varṇa*) refers to one's birth into a particular social strata or class – Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya or Śudra – a term often confused with "caste" (*jāti*). *Vaṇṇa* may imply a more general "fair and ugly," as in Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 106), but I read it as referring to social status following the explicit use of *vaṇṇa* in this way in the description of the previous knowledge.

[60] *Su-gati* and *dug-gati*, literally "good-going" and "bad-going" or "good/bad destination" refer primarily to the state in which one is reborn.

> these beings, sir, who pursued good conduct of the body, who pursued good conduct of speech, who pursued good conduct of mind, who did not scorn the noble ones, who had right views and took on actions based on right views; they, following the dissolution of the body, after death, reached a good rebirth, the world of heaven.[61]

Again the Buddha finishes his narration by stating how ignorance and darkness were replaced by knowledge and light.

Like the first one, the second knowledge relates to the sequence of human lives yet here the content of understanding relates to other people. The explicit emphasis is on the principle of karma that propels beings through states of existence in accordance with their actions: good people go to good rebirths, bad people to bad ones. In the experience of this knowledge, we sense that although the Buddha may have sat and examined the manner in which particular beings move through the process of death and rebirth, his realization is of a more generalized nature; the Buddha realizes how beings die and are reborn as a result of their actions. While the first knowledge revealed the contents of the Buddha's previous lives, the present one introduces the general principle through which life leads to future rebirth.

The first two forms of knowledge resemble each other also in their structure – both involve conceptual, verbal content. This raises two possible strategies of interpretation. One would be that the mention of knowledge is confabulated, that they are alien to the original heart of the text. The other would be that a more lenient understanding of the *jhāna* states, and particularly of the supposed transcendence of conceptuality is in order. These descriptions suggest that although no active thinking – certainly no reasoned analysis – takes place, acts of seeing that involve some degree of verbal noting and understanding may still occur. The price of accepting the first option is exceptionally high; it makes the main description of the Buddha's enlightenment in the early texts a fraud. The second reading allows more room for explanation and for the possibility that the account is reasonable, but it places a strong demand for clarification regarding what it means to see and to know in such a state.

[61] MN I.22-23: *So dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkantamānusakena satte passāmi cavamāne upapajjamāne hīne paṇīte suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate duggate yathākammūpage satte pajānāmi – 'ime vata bhonto sattā kāyaduccaritena samannāgatā vacīduccaritena samannāgatā manoduccaritena samannāgatā ariyānaṃ upavādakā micchādiṭṭhikā micchādiṭṭhikammasamādānā; te kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ upapannā. Ime vā pana bhonto sattā kāyasucaritena samannāgatā vacīsucaritena samannāgatā manosucaritena samannāgatā ariyānaṃ anupavādakā sammādiṭṭhikā sammādiṭṭhikammasamādānā; te kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggaṃ lokaṃ upapannā'ti.*

The description of these understandings may be overly elaborate and creative, but if we are able to identify the kernel of the philosophical perceptions to which the text is pointing, this enhanced expression may be seen as poetic license. Therefore, the understandings may be taken more figuratively than literally.

Together, the content of the first two understandings points to the character of the liberating event that will take place with the third knowledge. We understand that liberation responds to the notion of conditioning through action and that it should offer a solution to the law of karmic determination. In the meditative state he is in, the Buddha will have to gain conviction that he overcomes not only his personal, but also the ubiquitous, law of conditioning by which all of human reality abides. Indeed, the third knowledge can be seen as affording a concrete perception of the working of conditioning with enhanced resolution; it can be taken as a psychological, meditative solution to an existential, metaphysical problem.

The final and liberating event is called "the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows." Here we read:

> Then, when my concentrated mind was pure, clean, untarnished, free of defilements, supple, workable, steady, beyond vacillation, I directed the mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows. I realized truly "this is suffering" (*yathābhūtaṃ*),[62] I realized truly "this is the arising of suffering,"[63] I realized truly "this is the cessation of suffering," I realized truly "this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering." I realized truly "these are inflows," I realized truly "this is the arising of inflows," I realized truly "this is the cessation of inflows," I realized truly "this is the path that leads to the cessation of inflows." Knowing and seeing thus, my mind was liberated from the inflows of desire, from the inflows of [craving for] existence and from the inflows of ignorance.

After this presentation of the third knowledge, the Buddha emphasizes that this is the event he regards as liberation: "Being liberated there occurred the knowledge 'liberated,' and I realized 'birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what is to be done has been done, there will be no more being in this state.'" He ends his narration with a statement that is

[62] *Yathābhūtaṃ* can be translated in two basic ways – "as it is," "truly," "truthfully," or "as it arises." I choose a variant of the first translation here, which is in accordance with the central meaning of the term in Pāli or Sanskrit. But it must be said that a translation "as it arises" would be adequate in the present context in which the mind in *samādhi* is aware of mental events as they occur.

[63] In the context of the 4NTs, it has become commonplace to translate *samudaya*, literally "arising," as "origin." Since I read this text as relating a vision in *samādhi*, the viewing of the "arising of suffering" is more suitable than the abstract "origin of suffering."

adapted to each of the meditative knowledge he experienced during the night: "Thus, in me, the third knowledge was attained in the final watch of the night, ignorance was destroyed, knowledge arose, darkness was destroyed, light arose, as it happens for him who abides undistratcted, ardent and resolute."[64] Notice that the Buddha says that he "realized" (*abbhaññāsiṃ*) these truths, and not only that he "knew" (*pajānāti*) them, the term employed in the description of the previous two knowledge-events. The Buddha normally uses *pajānāti* in other discourses when he describes the arising of the same set of three understandings in the minds of his disciples.[65] This emphasis on "realizing" the third knowledge shows that this part of the text was understood to portray the heart of the Buddha's own liberating experience.

The third knowledge speaks of a quadruple method of observation that is applied twice, first to "suffering" (*dukkha*) and then to "inflows" (*āsava*).[66] We understand that the focus of the description is on the cessation of the two, which is echoed by the name of the knowledge "the destruction of the inflows" (*āsavānaṃ khayo*). We will be better prepared to appreciate the subtleties of this notion of liberation later. For now, let us anticipate our analysis with a few preliminary points.

First, we may recall that the Buddha is in deep *samādhi* while this liberating knowledge is said to take place. We will thus not be able to characterize the awakening to this knowledge as a fully philosophical moment in the sense of philosophy as abstract thinking based on

[64] MN I.23: *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte āsavānaṃ khayañāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesiṃ. So 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ. 'Ime āsavā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ. Tassa me evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha, bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha, avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha. Vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ ahosi. 'Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā'ti abbhaññāsiṃ. Ayaṃ kho me, brāhmaṇa, rattiyā pacchime yāme tatiyā vijjā adhigatā, avijjā vihatā vijjā uppannā, tamo vihato āloko uppanno, yathā taṃ appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato.*

[65] Such as in AN 5.75.

[66] I translate *āsava* as "inflows" – rather than other common translations such as "cankers," "taints," or "defilements" – in an attempt to preserve the connotation of the verb *ā<sru>* "to flow, pour out, flow toward". "Inflows", as I understand them, refer to forms of pain and conditioning that "flow" into the mind, which are propelled by self-centered and impassioned actions and intentions. The image of water is central; as water flows through a crack, pain flows through the passions into the mind. Note also the reference in BHSD, p. 112, to *āsrava* as equal to *ogha*, "flood." See also Johansson (1979: ch. 9), Schmithausen (1992: 2.2.2), Norman (1997: 34–35), and Devdas (2008: 137–41).

argumentation. More specifically, the Buddha cannot be observing "the four noble truths," which convey the theoretical understanding that human life is replete with pain that is caused by desire and will end in nirvāṇa. In fact, contrary to the way this text has been commonly read, we must notice that no mention is made here of "the four noble truths." Rather, the insight appears to be into the working of the Buddha's own mental processes as they occur, and the understanding he attains appears thoroughly personal and concrete. The choice of the word "*this*" (or "these") by the authors is crucial. The one most crucial word in the account of enlightenment I will develop in this study – "this" (*idaṃ/ayaṃ*) – is applied to specific mental objects that the Buddha perceives in the third knowledge. "This" refers to concrete occurrences in the Buddha's quieted and concentrated mind, to his observation of particular mental contents. Since the Buddha has full acquaintance with his "Buddhist" appraisal of reality, he probably did not actually need "to know" these occurrences conceptually but rather experienced their content directly; philosophical knowledge is here a form of direct experience. When the Buddha says – "Knowing and seeing thus, my mind was liberated from..." – he is not speaking of universal truths but of immediate moments of vision. In this respect, note the chosen mode of translation: not "these are *the* inflows," but "these are inflows" in the same manner as in the accepted translation "this is suffering," etc., and not "this is *the* suffering." Again, we are discussing the perception of specific cognitive objects, in this case of inflows.

We may notice that the same wording is given for the viewing of suffering and of the inflows, together with their arising, cessation, and path that leads to their cessation. This phrasing of the text has given rise to some scholarly consternation as scholars have tended to take it as proof that the text is corrupted. Thus, for instance, Schmithausen states that:

> In spite of the fact that this description, as the basis of so many enlarged or recast versions, must be comparatively old, it too cannot be accepted as representing the original account of Enlightenment, for the fourfold set of insight into the Cankers [the inflows], their origination, etc., which is, by the way, missing in some versions has obviously, for the sake of symmetry, been modeled on the fourfold pattern of the Noble Truths."[67]

Schmithausen then expresses further doubt about the reliability of the passage since there are other texts that explain that the "the origin of

[67] Schmithausen (1981: 205).

the cankers" is ignorance while ignorance is said to be one of the cankers. Nevertheless, Schmithausen believes it to be improbable that the description of the destruction of the *āsavas* is a later addition since it "seems to be a key term of the whole passage," a claim with which I fully concur.[68]

The third knowledge is termed "the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows." It thus seems reasonable that if any one of the two fourfold sets of observations that revolve around the concepts of suffering and of the inflows is later, that it would be one of the 4NTs. As the four observations became "noble truths" and grew to become the commanding rational of Buddhist practice, they may have been inserted into the passage as a generalized expression of the method by which the destruction of pain is to be achieved.[69] In Chapter 4 I will in fact show that the 4NTs are one of the younger sets of concepts in the Pāli discourses. If, as certain scholars accept, the terms of the 4NTs were inserted at a later date, they may be a generalized and conventionalized description of the experience of the destruction of the inflows.[70] This suggestion is supported by textual passages in which the first two knowledge-events appear unaltered while the third one only speaks of the destructions of inflows, without mentioning the 4NTs.[71] Another way of approaching this problem is by seeing the destruction of suffering and of the inflows as different definitions for one and the same event: one description employs the more general concept of "suffering," the second uses the more particular term of the "inflows." In actuality, the two destructions may turn out to be equal as the 4NTs express the overall philosophical rational of a specific observation of inflows. The key to this understanding is that the text does not speak of the 4NTs in abstract and general terms but uses them in order to understand the mental functioning of particular cognitive moments in *samādhi* – "*this* is suffering" and so forth.[72]

In Chapter 4, we will focus on the common textual presentations of the 4NT and further substantiate this interpretation of the teaching. There we will see that this set of meditative observations, which later became the four "noble truths," is closely linked to meditative observations

[68] Ibid., 206.
[69] Schmithausen contemplates the possibility that the 4NTs were not part of the original enlightenment experience and were introduced only later as part of an attempt at understanding or defining the experience. See Section E of his article, esp. pp. 209–11.
[70] Bronkhorst (1993: 108).
[71] See also the reference to SN II.210–14 in note 39.
[72] Hamilton (2003: 54–56) also emphasizes this description of enlightenment as relating not to universal truths but to personal experience, although she does not examine the context of *jhāna*.

that are at the root of the doctrines of dependent-origination and of selflessness. These teachings all had more restricted meanings than the ones they receive in the mature, evolved doctrines we study today. The 4NTs were originally a verbal formulation of a specific and highly defined meditative vision. No abstract realities are presented in these doctrines but a concrete, minimalist perception of truth, to be practiced and viewed in the stilled and quieted mind that has entered *samādhi*.

To some extent, the reading developed here has been anticipated by Richard Robinson and Willard Johnson in their introduction to the Buddhist religion (a more detailed version of Robinson's original work).[73] In Robinson's first edition, he is exceptionally clear in his description of the third knowledge:

> The third cognition is a philosophical theory (Greek *theōria*, "a seeing, a vision, a contemplation"). It is presented not as the fruits of speculation but as a direct perception, like the first two cognitions. The phrasing looks rather abstract to the modern reader, but clearly was intended, for all its generality, to be experiential and concrete.[74]

The later account developed by Robinson and Johnson is more complex. They synthesize the different early accounts of the Buddha's awakening in a way that is modeled on the description of liberation we have read above. Robinson and Johnson speak of the mind attaining a state of unity in which it passes through the four stages of *jhāna*. Then a series of knowledge-events occur, which revolve around a perception of the mechanism according to which conditioned experience functions. Robinson and Johnson show how the three types of knowledge focus on the same notion of conditionality: in the first knowledge the Buddha sees his previous lives, in the second he sees beings passing through the cycle of existence propelled by their karma, and in the third he views this same principle at work in the functioning of his own conditioned experience.[75]

Robinson and Johnson's account of the Buddha's enlightenment is unique in its ability to listen to the voice of the texts. This is particularly apparent when they state that the true locus of the vision of the 4NTs, as well as of other central Buddhist philosophical conceptualizations such as dependent-origination, is in meditative absorption. Robinson and Johnson also offer an interesting account of these meditative, philosophical visions and explain the mental attitude that allows this perception to become

[73] I refer to the fourth edition of the *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*.
[74] Robinson (1970: 19). [75] Robinson and Johnson (1997: 15–17).

liberating. This attitude involves the viewing of the five aggregates, which "cover the whole of describable and attachable [*sic*] reality, as not-I and not-mine."[76]

Still, Robinson and Johnson's account of the vision of the four noble truths in deep meditation must be nuanced. Their description is both too vague and too complex, when they say, for example, that following the entrance into the four *jhānas*,

> The meditator would then turn inward to reflect on the processes of dhyāna itself. . . . Further contemplation would bring about a realization of the impermanence, stress, and lack of self not only in the subtle pleasures of mental absorption but also in the insights arising from reflection, all of which count as subtle forms of the five skandhas. This realization would lead the mind to perceive these phenomena in light of the categories of the Four Noble Truths, inducing a sense of dispassion, cessation, and letting go, all of which were to be observed simply as passing events.[77]

This is only part of their compelling description, which I will only analyze briefly here. What does it mean, for example, that states of meditation are perceived "in light of the categories of the Four Noble Truths"? And what is intended by "the realization of the impermanence, stress, and lack of self not only in the subtle pleasures of mental absorption but also in the insights arising from reflection"? I am uncertain that these statements do not confuse conceptual philosophical understanding with direct experience. Rather than entering a complex discussion of these and other points in Robinson and Johnson's analysis, we will rest with the appreciation that we are not the first to realize that the realizations described in the theory of liberation express concrete philosophical perceptions. Here my intention will be to achieve a clearer understanding of what these perceptions were about.

In summary of this section, let us restate the basic problem and its proposed solution. The central theory of liberation advocated in the Nikāyas speaks of an awakening to a knowledge that involves a perception of the 4NTs in the deep, concentrated meditative state of the fourth *jhāna*. This theory is based on an ostensible ambiguity – it relies on the problematic combination of both meditative stillness and philosophical understanding. Here it is suggested that what we normally read as a conceptual and philosophical contemplation was at first a description of concrete and particular meditative moments. These meditative perceptions were catalyzed by a full interiorization of Buddhist wisdom, which had been

[76] Robinson and Johnson (1997: 37). [77] Robinson and Johnson (1997: 39).

contemplated to a degree that no conceptual effort had to be employed for it to inform experience. Wisdom thus becomes the correct, philosophical structuring of experience. An immediate, philosophical perception of this sort appears to be possible in the fourth *jhāna*, which has moved beyond some forms of rational thinking but is nevertheless a cognitive state in which there still is room for certain restricted forms of understanding.

1.2 "Cessation of perception and feeling"

As discussed in the previous section, there were many meditative states that were important for the early Buddhist understanding of liberation and that served as cherished goals for the early community. The most prominent of these are framed in a list of the nine successive *samādhi* levels, which contains the four *jhānas*, the four "formless attainments" (*ārūpyasamāpatti*) and "cessation of perception and feeling" (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). Other meditative states, such as the four *brahmavihāras* ("Brahma[-like] abodes)[78] or the "deliverances of mind" (*cetovimutti*), which may correspond to some of the nine *samādhi* states but are normally presented as independent of them,[79] are generally not seen as being as central to the early accounts of liberation as the list of the nine *samādhis*. Aside from the fourth *jhāna*, there is one state to which particular emphasis is given in the texts and which therefore deserves our attention. This is the final, ninth *samādhi* of "cessation."

Cessation appears as a meditative state quieter than all others.[80] It is normally said to take place after one has passed through the four *jhānas* and through the four "formless" (*ārūpya*) attainments of "the base of infinite space" (*ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ*), "the base of infinite consciousness" (*viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ*[81]), "the base of nothingness" (*ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ*),

[78] See for instance in the *Vatthūpama-sutta* at MN I.38. Interestingly, in this text the Buddha speaks of achieving liberation after the practice of the four *brahmavihāras* following a perception which the commentator equates with the 4NTs. See in Bodhi and Ñāṇamoli (1995: 1181, n.96).

[79] For a presentation of the "deliverances of mind" see in the *Mahāvedalla-sutta* at MN I.296–298. The question of the relationship between these states and the central list of nine *samādhi* accomplishments appears to be an ancient one as it figures prominently in this text. The *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* of the MN also exemplifies the relationship between the "signless" (*animmita*) or the "empty" (*suñña*) states of mind and other *samādhi* attainments, specifically the four formless attainments. For a further discussion of this last text and the relationship between the meditative states it deals with, see Schmithausen (1981: 234–36) and Bronkhorst (1993: 7.2.1).

[80] Griffiths (1981: 609) has aptly described the nine stages of *samādhi* as "states of consciousness, which become progressively more empty of intellectual and emotional contents."

[81] *Viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ*, rather than *viññānānancāyatanaṃ*, due to a haplology. See Geiger (1994: 57); Wynne (2007: 112, n.10).

and "the base of neither perception nor non-perception" (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ*).[82] Although the common description of these last four states supplies not much more than their names, these names themselves imply exceptionally deep meditative experiences in which there remains only minimal, if any, cognitive content.[83] The last meditative level in the list of nine states, cessation, is said to be beyond all forms of "perception and feeling" (*saññā-vedayita*) and is even characterized as similar to death.[84] Most authors regard cessation as an unconscious state.[85]

While cessation appears to be true to its name, there is reason to suggest that the understanding of this state was not uniform.[86] At least one important text suggests that the impact of cessation is "only" that the monk who has attained it "does not conceive" (*na maññati*).[87] Another passage, which speaks of cessation's similarity to death, allows for a certain range of interpretation regarding how conscious or unconscious the state actually is.[88] Finally, the name "cessation of perception and feeling" itself does not necessarily imply a cataleptic-like state devoid of content, as it

[82] A number of scholars have suggested that these *ārūpya* attainments were not originally Buddhist and were incorporated into the Buddhist system as the tradition was growing and developing. See Frauwallner (1973: 139–40); Bronkhorst (1993: ch. 7, 2009: 54–56); Norman (1997: 31); and Collins (2010: 46–47). Wynne (2007) emphasizes the centrality of these states to the Buddhist tradition but sees them as being adapted from non-Buddhist circles and given Buddhist distinctions.

[83] Crangle (1994: 205) believes the eighth *samādhi* state, "the base of neither perception nor non-perception" to already be semi-conscious while Schmithausen (1981: 224) is convinced that it is wholly beyond any form of ideation. See also in Bronkhorst (2000 [1993]: 81–82). For a somewhat more colorful reading of the terse description of these four *āyatanas*, see Deleanu (2010: 608–9).

[84] SN IV.294, as well as MN I.296 (but see the reference to this passage below in note 88).

[85] Griffiths (1986: 10); King (1992: 105–6); Crangle (1994: 242).

[86] See also Collins (1995: 156–61) as well as Schmithausen (1981: 223). It should be stated that differences exist regarding the fourth *jhāna* as well. SN IV.217–218 states, for instance, that in the fourth *jhāna* in-breath and out-breath cease. This ascetic characterization of the fourth *jhāna* is puzzling, since the regular descriptions of this state do not suggest such an extreme bodily state but "only" that one transcends experiences of pleasure and pain.

[87] See the *Sappurisa-sutta* (MN 113, MN III.45). This means probably that he does not impose the perspective of the self on the contents of experience. See the discussion of the verb *maññati* in note 10 to Chapter 2 below.

[88] In MN I.296, Sāriputta is asked: "He whose time has come and is dead and the monk who has attained cessation of perception and feeling – what is the difference between them?" He answers:

> "Friend, for one whose time has come and is dead, the conditioned formations (*saṅkhārā*) of the body have ceased and tranquilized, the conditioned formations of speech have ceased and tranquilized, the conditioned formations of the mind have ceased and tranquilized, the life-force is extinguished, heat is quenched and his faculties are shattered. Also for the monk who has attained cessation of perception and feeling, the conditioned formations of the body have ceased and tranquilized, the conditioned formations of speech have ceased and tranquilized, the conditioned formations of the mind have ceased and tranquilized, [but] the life-force is not extinguished, heat is not quenched and his faculties are clear. He whose time has come and is dead and the monk who has attained cessation of perception and feeling – this is the difference between them."

explicitly speaks only of a stilling of "perception" and "feelings"; we could conceive of a conscious state that is beyond these types of cognition but which still maintains a degree of awareness.[89] We should notice that the fourth *jhāna*, which is surely a cognitive state – I use the term "cognition" in the broad sense as experience that possesses an active aspect of knowing – appears to be beyond at least pleasant and unpleasant *vedanā* ("feelings").[90] Also, the transcendence of *saññā* ("perceptions") does not inevitably demand that no form of consciousness can still operate.[91]

Yvāyaṃ, āvuso, mato kālaṅkato, yo cāyaṃ bhikkhu saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samāpanno – imesaṃ kiṃ nānākaraṇa"nti? Yvāyaṃ, āvuso, mato kālaṅkato tassa kāyasaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, vacīsaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, cittasaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, āyu parikkhīṇo, usmā vūpasantā, indriyāni paribhinnāni. Yo cāyaṃ bhikkhu saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samāpanno tassapi kāyasaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, vacīsaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, cittasaṅkhārā niruddhā paṭippassaddhā, āyu na parikkhīṇo, usmā avūpasantā, indriyāni vippasannāni. Yvāyaṃ, āvuso, mato kālaṅkato, yo cāyaṃ bhikkhu saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samāpanno – idaṃ nesaṃ nānākaraṇa"nti

The two states of death and cessation share the common feature of the stilling of conditioned formations of body, speech and mind. What is meant by this statement – what "the conditioned formations" that are stilled precisely are – is left somewhat vague and does not necessarily involve the stopping of all conscious activity. Plainly, this text has not explicitly said that consciousness has ceased. In this sense, the definitions of what ceases in cessation in the following sutta (MN 44, I.301), which state that bodily formations are equal to in-breath and out-breath, speech formations to *vitakka and vicāra*, and mind-formations to perception and feeling (*saññā* and *vedanā*) is confusing since only the last of these are said to subside in cessation itself. Next, the monk in cessation is said to have "bright" or "clear" (*vippasanna*) faculties (*indriya*), while those of the dead body are "shattered" (*paribhinna*). These bright faculties imply some level of consciousness. It also may be adequate to understand this last statement in light of ancient Indian understandings of death, which feared a state in which the body may become scattered and dispersed throughout the cosmos (see Freedman [2011: ch. 2]). Hence, it may be preferable to translate *vippasanna* in this context not as "clear," but as "whole" while *paribhinna* may mean "scattered" rather than "shattered." For a discussion of these ancient understandings of death in India and in other places, see Lincoln (1986: 122ff.).

89 See also Hakamaya (1975), who discusses understandings of cessation as *sacittaka* or *acittaka* (with or without consciousness, respectively), which are developed in different strands of the Buddhist tradition. Sāriputta's equation between wisdom and consciousness at MN I.292 is also of interest, given that wisdom is said to operate in cessation: "That which is wisdom is consciousness; these phenomena are united, not separated; it is impossible to distinguish these phenomena, and having distinguished between them to make known their different functions. What one knows (*pajānāti*), one is conscious of (*vijānāti*), and vice versa." (*yā cāvuso, paññā yañ ca viññāṇaṃ – ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā, no visaṃsaṭṭhā. Na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetuṃ. Yaṃ hāvuso pajānāti taṃ vijānāti, yaṃ vijānāti taṃ pajānāti.*)

90 See the description of the *jhānas* in the previous section, pp. 36–38.

91 Numerous verses from the AV would support an understanding that going beyond perception still pertains to life in the world (for example, SNip 874). See also MN I.38, which characterizes realization as "the highest withdrawal from [all] this that belongs to perception" (*imassa saññāgatassa uttariṃ nissaraṇanti*). Although Gomez (1976: 140) and Vetter (1990: 48) define a strong apophatic inclination in the transcendence of perception in the AV, other readings could be defended, as attempted by Burford (1991).

While there may be some room for interpretation regarding the nature of cessation, scholars of early Buddhism have tended to adopt the more extreme reading, which views it as completely beyond any cognition or ideation.[92] Cessation is also usually understood as a state that anticipates the condition the adept will reach upon his death.[93] This understanding of cessation naturally connects to a view of Buddhist truth as an unconditioned, ultimate, and possibly eternal reality. Although one can argue whether such an understanding is on par with the Buddhist position of *anātman* and with the definition of "eternalism" (*sassata*) and "annihilation" (*uccheda*) as mistaken, extreme views from which the correct middle-path steers away, it is certain that the interpretation of cessation as a form of ultimate reality grew to become dominant within the tradition. This interpretation is implied, for instance, in discourses that speak of the turning away from the still conditioned states of *jhāna*, when the adept is content only upon reaching the fully transcendent state of cessation as discussed below. At times cessation is referred to, among other things as "the deathless element," a term that again suggests a final, ultimate, and positive reality.[94]

Cessation and its philosophical implications are not the focus of this study. Nevertheless, a short look at the common textual description of this state is in order since it resonates in interesting ways with the theory of liberation that is at the heart of this work. As with the theory of liberation in the fourth *jhāna*, the destruction of the inflows through wisdom is central to the logic of liberation in cessation. The common statement is that for the monk who has attained this state: "*Having seen with wisdom, his inflows are destroyed*".[95]

[92] The paradigmatic case is Griffiths (1986). See also Schmithausen's (1981: section K) discussion of the *Jhāna-sutta* of the AN.

[93] See, for example, Schmithausen (1981: 214, 249); Harvey (1995: ch. 11); Arbel (2004); Bronkhorst (2009: 56).

[94] The turning toward cessation as the deathless element is particularly strong in the *Jhāna-sutta* of the AN (9.36). Here the same formula that appears in the *Mahāmāluṅkya-sutta* (MN 64, quoted below) is connected explicitly to the attainment of cessation. See also in the *Aṭṭhakanāgara-sutta* (MN 52) and a discussion of all of these texts in Schmithausen (1981: J). Other texts that connect to this approach are the *Anupada-sutta* (MN 111), the *Sappurisa-sutta* (MN 113), and the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* (MN 121). Harvey (1995: ch. 10–12) is an example of a modern scholar who emphasizes the ultimate and final nature of this realization. Nāgārjuna is among the Buddhist thinkers who endeavored to expose the flaws involved in the view of Nirvāṇa as an unconditioned state or as a state of cessation. See for example *Śūnyatā-saptati* 23–32.

[95] *Paññāya cassa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*. Notice Schmithausen's (1981: 216, n.55) observation that this formula is prominent in the MN and the AN but is absent from the DN and SN.

It is uncertain precisely what the adept sees in cessation, or put another way what is the object of his wisdom.[96] Moreover, since cessation is said to be beyond perception, the possibility that wisdom arises *following* the emergence from this state must be entertained.[97] Nevertheless, we must mark what the terse wording of the text expresses unambiguously: liberative experience includes the destruction of the inflows in deep meditation, and this experience is affected by "seeing with wisdom." Thus, liberation in both the fourth *jhāna* and in cessation is based on the same three fundamental features: (1) the destruction of inflows, through (2) wisdom/knowledge, in a state of (3) *samādhi*. There is a clear blueprint for liberation at work in both these theories. Although explaining the relationship between wisdom and *samādhi* in cessation is even more difficult than it is with regard to the fourth *jhāna*, the more important point is that this is what the authors of these texts chose to convey. We thus should investigate whether this relationship is based on a logic we can accept. We should also note the difference between the occurrence of knowledge (*ñāṇa*) in the fourth *jhāna* and that of wisdom (*paññā*) in cessation. It seems reasonable that knowledge is more analytical and lends itself more easily to conceptualization while wisdom may be more intuitive.

Many scholars would doubt the possibility that any form of wisdom can occur in a state that is said to be beyond perception and therefore would maintain that the texts have been manipulated. Still, even if such an argument is accepted, the manipulation of the description of realization in cessation *in this particular way* is significant. The fact that even in a state that is considered beyond knowledge as we understand it, wisdom is said to destroy the inflows, shows that the destruction of the inflows through wisdom was thought to be the central feature of the enlightenment experience.

On a more speculative note, the resemblance between the two theories of enlightenment in the fourth *jhāna* and in cessation may help us figure out the logic of their relationship. In other words, we may be able to connect the negatively defined realization in which the inflows are destroyed and the positively defined one which consists of a discovery of "the deathless." The early texts are generally consistent in stating that the Buddha's own awakening took place in the fourth *jhāna* in which certain types of knowledge arose. Yet now the Buddha has introduced a second soteriological goal – cessation – the conceptual description of which is

[96] Schmithausen (1981: 216–17) mentions three options for the content of knowledge in cessation: the inflows, cessation itself, or the four noble truths. Schmithausen favors the first of these and finds the third of them, which he borrows from La Valleé Poussin (1936: 7) to be the least plausible.

[97] Schmithausen (1981: 217–18).

much thinner, and which lends itself to a different vision of liberation – an encounter with an ultimate truth, realized temporarily in meditation and to be fully actualized upon death. Can these two views of liberation complement each other, or must they be seen as contradictory?

As has long been realized, the Buddha probably reached new understandings during his forty-five year-long teaching career, which may have included reflections on his experience of liberation.[98] If we take the description of liberation in the fourth *jhāna* as our starting point, we may suggest that some of the other soteriological paradigms described in the texts reflect the Buddha's refined understandings of the merits and limitations of his own liberative experiences, or of the way he defined these experiences conceptually. For example, the Buddha or one of his spiritual heirs (when and to whom the process may have happened is of secondary importance – the real question is how the different theories relate to each other) may have encountered the following thought in this particular textual variant applied to the first seven states of *samādhi* (here narrated in the third person as a description of a certain monk's meditation):

> Whatever phenomena there pertain to the body, to sensations, to percep tions, to conditioned formations and to consciousness, he fully perceives them as impermanent, painful, ill, swollen, wounded, grieving, afflicted, alien, decaying, empty and selfless.

This perception then recommends a particular approach to the meditative states and to what is beyond them:

> He turns the mind away from these things. Having turned away from them, he focuses his mind on the deathless element: "this is peaceful, this supreme, the quieting of all conditioned formations, the forsaking of all burning material,[99] the end of thirst, the passionless cessation, nibbāna.[100]

The warning against attachment to *samādhi* states is well known,[101] but this passage contains a constructive aspect as well. It begins with an

[98] Gombrich (1990: esp. p. 9).

[99] For the translation of *upadhi* as "burning material" and as a metaphor for the aggregates, see Hwang (2006: ch. 2) and Gombrich (2009: 115–16).

[100] MN I.435–36 (from the *Mahāmāluṅkyaputta-sutta*, MN 64): *So yad eva tattha hoti rūpagataṃ vedanāgataṃ saññāgataṃ saṅkhāragataṃ viññāṇagataṃ te dhamme aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato samanupassati.*

So tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpeti. So tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpetvā amatāya dhātuyā cittaṃ upasaṃharati – 'etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhākkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan'ti.

[101] This element is central to the accounts of *samādhi* in texts such as *Aṭṭhakanāgara-sutta* (MN 52), *Anupada-sutta* (MN 111), *Sappurisa-sutta* (MN 113), *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* (MN 121), *Jhāna-sutta* (AN 4.36), and *Mahānidāna-sutta* (DN 15, II.69–71).

appraisal of the meditative states encountered as impermanent and conditioned, a perception that stipulates a relinquishing of any enthusiasm toward them. The relinquishing of attachment toward the *samādhi* state then leads the mind toward a positive and apparently ultimate truth that is defined, among other things, as "the deathless" and as "nibbāna." The text is based on a dualistic statement, being partly negative – turning away from the *jhānic* attainment, and partly positive – turning toward ultimately unconditioned reality.

It is possible to view this quote as part of a continuous reflection on the nature of the experiences regarded as liberating. As the Buddha or his disciples realized that their own achievements were still conditioned, they turned away from such "ill, swollen, wounded" phenomena and delved further into the depths of their own minds to discover states of yet more profound quiet and calm. Salient among these states was cessation, which may have been valued as an unconditioned and particularly limpid state that allowed for a further destruction of "inflows." It may be questioned whether cessation was deemed to be superior to the fourth *jhāna*, but the texts appear to reflect a preference for the state in which the Buddha is said to have achieved his own liberating experience. In both states, it was thought that "inflows" are relinquished and thus brought to their end by envisioning them with wisdom.

The process of reflection on meditative attainments possibly led to new meditative discoveries and to refined philosophical insights. Furthermore, while perfecting his theory of liberation, the Buddha (or his student) was probably exposed to realizations and philosophical currents from rival spiritual traditions. If the Buddha is our example, he probably recalled the formative realizations he cultivated along his path to Buddhahood, such as his instruction under Alāra Kāḷama and Udaka Rāmaputta.[102] Other Buddhist practitioners probably had comparable experiences. The early Buddhist may thus have participated in the importation of a spiritual vocabulary or cartography of mind from competing religious traditions. This could have included the *samādhi* states that follow the fourth *jhāna* in the list of nine states or the connection made between a meditative attainment and the state the adept will reach after his death.[103]

[102] Wynne (2005: section 6, 2007: ch. 2) has shown that there is good reason to accept the account of the Buddha's apprenticeship under these two teachers in the APS as authentic.

[103] The notion that central elements of Buddhist doctrines and practices originated in non-Buddhist traditions is central to accounts such as Bronkhorst (1993, 1995, 2009) and Vetter (1990). The fact that leading disciples of the Buddha such as Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna entered the Buddhist

The important point to take note of here is that the broad possibilities for meditative experiences and philosophical understandings that are related by the early texts should not necessarily be taken as being in dissonance with each other; the multiplicity may be a sign of vitality and strength while different theories and approaches resonate and complement each other and reflect serious engagement with the materials. Meditative practice need not conform perfectly to elegant classification. We may be encountering here an experimental and creative tradition that was generous enough to leave testimony of its variegated experiences and insights rather than a manipulative community of textual exegetes whose account is full of contradictions. Variety can be evidence for fertility.

The positive formulation of ultimate reality expressed by such concepts as "the deathless" or "Brahman" was surely influential in the cultural milieu in which the Buddha participated. This is evidenced by the *Brahma-vihāra* meditations or by cases such as when the Buddha teaches "the way to meeting Brahma" (*brahmānaṃ sahabyatāya maggaṃ*) in the *Kevaddha-sutta*.[104] Possibly, this philosophical intuition was borrowed from non-Buddhist traditions, but it need not necessarily be interpreted as a non-organic part of the Buddhist view. This positive articulation of truth can be seen as complementing the more negative expression of the destruction of the inflows and as representing different aspects of the same experience. Much like the analogy of the orange discussed earlier, which can be both sweet and sour, the sense of freedom and purity experienced by the clearing of inflows can be interpreted by the practitioner as an introduction to the realms of ultimate truth.[105] Freeing himself from the constraints of the inflows, he may intuit a state fully beyond all conditioned and constraining realities that he may now deem to call both "cessation" and "the deathless."

While the early Buddhist texts present a large variety of profound meditative experiences that function in divergent theories of liberation, the reading suggested here has an integrative effect. By identifying the core logic of liberating experiences as the destruction of inflows in *samādhi*

saṃgha after studying under other teachers (usually thought to have been Ājīvikas) is an almost random example of how such penetration of non-Buddhist elements could have been effected.

[104] See also the *Kandaraka-sutta* of the MN where the Buddha speaks of "those who experience pleasure, through having become Brahma (*sukhapaṭisaṃvedī brahmabhūtena attanā*)."

[105] The language of a positive and a negative formulation of realization was employed by Schmithausen (1981: section J, K), who follows La Vallée Poussin (1936: 37). Visions of ultimate truth that do not necessarily connect to cessation are easily encountered in the early Buddhist texts. A prominent example would be *Udāna* 8.1 and 8.3. See also in the APS that defines *nibbāna*, among other things, as "the deathless highest calm of yoga (*amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ*)."

through knowledge, other meditative states or philosophical positions can be seen to revolve around this central type of experience. Other meditative states may be viewed as opportunities to enhance and enrich the potency of meditative realization and to explore the opportunities it affords. It also appears possible to generate the attitude that functions in the context of liberating meditative experiences outside the context of meditation. A true adoption of such an attitude clearly has a liberating effect in itself, even when the mind is not in *samādhi*.

Once again, the question of whether any form of knowledge is possible in deep *samādhi* – in the fourth *jhāna* and especially in cessation – is not one that is easily answered. The possibility remains that a full verbal account of the events is part of the post-meditation process of reflection. Nevertheless, we must be sensitive enough to the texts' recurrent claim that wisdom and *samādhi* can go together. Our goal here will therefore be to develop a constricted definition of Buddhist philosophical theory, particularly of the 4NTs, which may be directly experienced in *jhāna*. Such unelaborated forms of Buddhist wisdom may actually be *seen*, and not only thought of or understood, in concentrated meditation. It is these forms of knowledge that may allow us to rely on the central descriptions of awakening in the Nikāyas and to see them as trustworthy theories of enlightenment.

1.3 Broader theoretical perspectives

The account of early Buddhist liberation that is being developed in these pages explores the way pivotal Buddhist philosophical theories may have functioned within the context of *jhānic* meditative practice. In order to facilitate the appreciation of this plot, I wish to connect the discussion to two important, broader theoretical perspectives that have occupied scholars of Buddhism. These are, first, the character of early Buddhism as an ascetic and world-renouncing tradition, possibly with a pessimistic or a negative appraisal of the value of human life. The second is the traditional place of experience, particularly of meditative experience, in the history of the Buddhist tradition.

1.3.1 Buddhist Pessimism

In emphasizing meditative *samādhi* attainment as central to the early Buddhist path to liberation, an important choice has been made, which mandates a taxing recognition: this tradition considers deep meditative

states to be more profound, richer levels of reality than the states of consciousness most of us are familiar with. The states of mind this tradition cherished and cultivated are far removed from the ones at work, for example, while writing or reading these words. This recognition raises the question whether the "middle-way" this tradition advocated would be accepted as one by people in the cultural world we participate in. This is a position favored by people who have renounced life in society and who seem to have entertained serious doubts about the value of mundane human life.

In this section, I will outline this theme of "Buddhist pessimism" and discuss it based on its presentation in Louis De La Vallée Poussin's *The Way to Nirvāṇa*.[106] While La Vallée Poussin's exposition is not without problems, and while its tone and contents have been criticized in many studies,[107] it still remains one of the best expositions and analyses of the positions held by the early Buddhist tradition, even as we are nearing a century since its initial publication.

La Vallée Poussin's study can be seen as an exploration of certain approaches to nirvāṇa within the Buddhist tradition. As he reflects on the different theories and statements, La Vallée Poussin vacillates between a more negative evaluation of nirvāṇa and a more positive one. He is especially puzzled by the fact that, on the one hand, many Buddhist texts are clear that nirvāṇa is a negative state that represents the absolute end of everything human, while on the other hand the characteristic Buddhist temperament is a positive and deeply moral one. He then entertains the possibility that nothing real can be predicated of nirvāṇa, which is a state that transcends all human imagination. La Vallée Poussin thus delineates three basic interpretations of nirvāṇa, all encountered in the Buddhist texts: nirvāṇa as (1) annihilation, (2) immortality, and (3) "unqualified deliverance," which cannot be comprehended in any way (p. 115).

In analyzing the evidence in favor of these three paradigmatic approaches, La Vallée Poussin emphasizes that the goal of early Buddhist teaching is to prevent further transmigration. He is further impressed by the fact that the Buddhist monk practices in order to reach a state of concentration in which "notion and feeling are destroyed" (that is cessation) and that nirvāṇa is said to be the state in which a saint abides after his death (pp. 113–14). These observations support the reading of

[106] La Vallée Poussin (1982 [1917]). I rely mainly on the final two chapters of La Vallée Poussin's book and especially on Chapter 5.
[107] Most salient is La Vallée Poussin's statement on page 111 (1982 [1917]) regarding the naturally unclear ideas of Indian "men exhausted by a severe diet and often stupefied by the practice of ecstasy."

nirvāṇa as annihilation. But La Vallée Poussin also contemplates the idea that annihilation may not be much more than the regrettable but inevitable consequence of the doctrine of selflessness, a teaching that forces the position that nothing can persist after death (pp. 116–17, 124–26). La Vallée Poussin also believes that over time Buddhism developed a theory of gradual striding through many lifetimes toward the negative goal of annihilation. This theory allowed the Buddhist practitioners a more balanced approach to life and practice, since it defers annihilation to the very distant future (pp. 122–23). This theory may have combined with the more positively shaded traditional Indian quest for immortality (p. 128).

By this stage of his discussion, La Vallée Poussin has both advanced a strong reading of the notion of annihilation and questioned its reality as the dominant image of truth in the eyes of early Buddhism. He is less eager to adopt the notion of nirvāṇa as immortality, however, especially on the doctrinal level. Here he suggests that nirvāṇa may be best understood as "'unqualified deliverance,' a deliverance of which we have no right to predicate anything" (p. 131). This position, which agrees with the recurrent statement made by the Buddha that after his death he cannot be said to exist or not to exist in any way, can be seen as a middle way between the views of annihilation and immortality. Naturally, La Vallée Poussin offers this understanding with the help of the simile of the poisoned arrow introduced in the *Cūḷamāluṅkyaputta-sutta* (MN: 63).[108]

With three viable textual appraisals of the nirvāṇa, La Vallée Poussin scorns the scholarly attempt to reconcile them (pp. 134–35). He reminds his reader of the heterogeneous nature of the early Buddhist community and of the understanding that the Buddha adapted his teaching to the needs of his listeners: selflessness was taught in order to reduce self-cherishing, transmigration in order to avoid the apathy aroused by the doctrine of annihilation at death, the happiness of deliverance so that men will forsake their trivial desires (p. 136). Finally:

> Last, not least, Śakyamuni does not hide this fact that deliverance is absolute silence and annihilation, the end of suffering, because it is the end of feeling. Why does he teach such a doctrine? I dare say, because the most pragmatist of the philosophers cannot help sometimes describing things as he believes they are: deliverance *is* annihilation and there are some few disciples worthy to be told the truth. (p. 137, emphasis in the original)

[108] See a discussion of this text in ch. 2, section 2.1.

This seminal scholar of Buddhism thus believes that at the heart of the early Buddhist teaching was a deeply negative and pessimistic goal.

La Vallée Poussin's conclusions surely need not be accepted without criticism, and many aspects of his analysis can clearly be contested.[109] For our concerns, his heightened emphasis on the centrality of cessation and his dismissal of the significance of "trance," which includes *jhāna*, are specifically problematic (pp. 159–61). Indeed, the reading of the early Buddhist texts that is being developed here need not necessarily lend itself to any of the three understandings of nirvāṇa listed by La Vallée Poussin. What is essential for our concerns is not, however, La Vallée Poussin's conclusions but his candid discussion of the issues. Such a straightforward analysis as the one he conducts has no option but to come to terms with the centrality of the notion of annihilation for the early Buddhist tradition and particularly with its relevance to understanding the most cherished goals of this tradition. Even if the meditative state of cessation and the notion of nirvāṇa after death were not part of the earliest Buddhist beliefs, they were easily integrated into the Buddhist system. This is the result of early Buddhism's fundamentally ascetic and world-renouncing orientation.

The early Buddhist texts are replete with examples regarding the pessimistic stance adopted by at least important strands of the early Buddhist community. As a discussion of these issues would take us too far adrift, I will only mention some of the most exemplary positions of the tradition:

(1) The instruction to "go forth from the home-life into homelessness" and the fact that the true practitioner must be a monk.[110] Life in the world is seen as inferior to life that has left the world behind and is essentially regarded as dangerous and unsatisfactory.

(2) The view that nirvāṇa is the end of *saṃsāra*, the wheel of life and death, and that the goal of the spiritual path is not to be reborn.[111]

[109] For example, La Vallée Poussin makes much of the notion that the doctrine of selflessness leaves no option for continuance after death (pp. 116–17, 124–26). While it is true that no self can continue under such a doctrine, other aspects of the personality, such as the aggregates, can; see McDermott (1980).

[110] See for instance in the SPhS at DN I.63, where a householder culminates his reflection on the possibility of leaving the household life by saying *agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajeyyam* ("Would I go from the home to homelessness").

[111] See, for example, the *Bālapaṇḍita-sutta* at SN II.23–25, which defines the difference between the fool and the wise man as the fact the first will be reborn since he has not quit his attachment to his body while the latter will not be reborn due to his eradication of desire. See also the last verse of the famous *Metta-sutta* (SNip 152), which shows that the developing of love (*metta*) aims at bringing one to the state that "he will never again go to lie in a womb" (*na hi jātuggabbhaseyya punaretīti*). Or see the following verse from the AV (SNip 776): "I see these people trembling toward the world, moved by their passions toward states of existence. Poor people chatter in the jaws of death, without

(3) The doctrine that full liberation is achieved only upon death, when all conditioned "burning fuel," that is the five aggregates, will be fully consumed. Thus, so long as there is life, there can be no freedom.[112]

A resonant doctrine is dependent-cessation, which includes "the cessation of consciousness" as part of religious perfection.[113]

(4) The mention of the severe ascetic exercises the Buddha practiced.[114] While these practices surely are not heralded as the goal or the core of the Buddhist path, the fact that they were part of the Buddha's training is telling with regard to the end he was striving toward.

In this context it is worth mentioning the caricature of the doctrines preached by rival ascetics in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* (SPhS).[115] The effort to distinguish the Buddha's teaching from the ones of his nihilist colleagues, teaches us about the milieu from which he emerged. The same is true regarding the frequent debates with students of the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nataputta in the early discourses.

Following La Vallée Poussin, I must emphasize that the early Buddhist tradition is not *only* negative in its approach to human life and that it advocates many positive values, among them the possibility of attaining *nirvāṇa*. But this cursory discussion demonstrates that the negative approach to life was organic to the early Buddhist meditative culture whose main goal was to decondition their attraction to living in the world. In any case, I wish not to argue in favor of this somewhat depressing understanding but to portray it as an important part of the early Buddhist intellectual and emotional climate. I weave these materials into the discussion not because I am convinced that the early Buddhist tradition was fully pessimistic, as different interpretations of the early materials can obviously be developed. I mention them only in order to point out the cultural reality in which the practice of *jhāna* is couched.

The appreciation of the negative element of the early Buddhist philosophical and religious climate will be helpful in coming to terms with the

having quitted their passion toward states of existence and non-existence" (*passāmi loke pariphandamānaṃ, pajaṃ imaṃ taṇhagataṃ bhavesu; hīnā narā maccumukhe lapanti, avītataṇhāse bhavābhavesu*).

112 This is the view that *nirupādisesa nibbāna* is attained at death while *nibbāna* in life is still "with remainder/burning fuel" (*sa-upādisesa*). See Harvey (1995: ch. 11, esp. 181–82); Hwang (2006: esp. ch. 2); Gombrich (2009: ch. 8); Brahmāli (2009).

113 See, for instance, in the standardized description of the twelve links at the opening of the *Nidāna-saṃyutta* at SN II.1–2, quoted below in note 75 to Chapter 2.

114 For example, in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* of the MN (36, I.237–51).

115 DN 2, I.51–59.

nature of the knowledge that arises in *jhāna*. This knowledge is meant to facilitate detachment from some of the most intuitive human inclinations. This was thought to free man from otherwise inevitable pain and to pave the path toward rarely attained happiness.

1.3.2 Experience and meditative experience

Robert Sharf, in his important and provocative essay titled "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," argued that the notion that the Buddhist religion always revolved around "meditative experience" is mostly a modern myth. The experience-oriented appraisal of Buddhism, Sharf claims, was shaped by leading Buddhist Zen and Vipassanā teachers who elegantly packaged Buddhism in accordance with the tastes of its new occidental audiences. These modern teachers and writers, in turn, were influenced by the anti-dogmatic tide in western intellectual circles at the time. As he criticizes the common interpretation of Buddhism as experience-oriented, Sharf shows how in a number of Buddhist historical traditions, the stock practices of Buddhism were study and ritual, rather than meditation. Relying on work in the fields of religious and Buddhist studies, Sharf next demonstrates that although many texts do speak of meditation, the normal usage of these texts in a natural Buddhist context was social or ritualistic; the study of any prescribed meditation precedes, and often supplants, the actual practice of meditation. Sharf thus advances the compelling claim that for the heart of the Buddhist tradition, "meditative experience" was commonly more of a structured belief or an adopted ideology than a lived reality.

Janet Gyatso (1999) has answered many of the claims raised by Sharf from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism's esoteric traditions. Gyatso shows that the concept of experience, particularly meditative experience, is an integral aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. At the same time, Gyatso also accepts what she believes to be Sharf's "most significant point" that:

> Sharf's argument that private, nondiscursive, immediate experience is not to be found at the heart of Buddhist practice does largely hold true for Tibetan Buddhist practice as well, even if some theoretical writings seem to suggest otherwise. Indeed, in contrast to the way that claims of private, unmediated religious experience have often served as a strategic device to preserve autonomy and immunity to scientific scrutiny (Proudfoot), claims of experience in the Tibetan Buddhist context are mediated by a variety of signs, signs made possible precisely by experience's own mediated (and mediating) nature. Such signs and expressions render the virtuoso's

> experience subject not only to a kind of scrutiny but even to the *participation* of disciples, colleagues, and patrons. But if private, nondiscursive, immediate experience cannot be said to be at the heart of Tibetan Buddhism, this is not to argue that there is no notion of experience at the heart of Tibetan Buddhism at all; quite the contrary.[116]

Gyatso grants that the concept of experience is often romanticized but argues that this does not mean that experience is not integral to the tradition. She shows how Tibetan Buddhism employs a number of terms to mark experience and analyzes the role of experience in the *Mahāmudrā* and *Rdzog-chen* traditions. Gyatso agrees with Sharf that in many, probably in most, cases, monks preferred the relatively relaxed monastic life of study and ritual to intense and secluded meditation. She thus accepts Sharf's formulation as an "important revision of western presumptions about Buddhist practice." Yet Gyatso is also clear that this "should not be taken to the extreme, to suggest that Buddhists do not also sometimes seek what they take to be religiously salvific experience through meditation and other practices" (p. 116). Gyatso speaks of the contexts in which meditation and experience were central, and relates to the way the adepts who devote themselves to practice based on experience are revered and admired by the tradition.

Following Gyatso's lead, while I easily concede that the notion of "meditative experience" in Buddhism is overused and too easily accepted, especially when the experience is said to be "non-conceptual," "non-discursive," "pure," or "non-dual," it should be acknowledged that Sharf has presented no substantial claim regarding the place of meditation in the earlier phases of Buddhist history. Moreover, what may be Sharf's most important argument – that in Buddhism the notion of experience is prescriptive rather than descriptive and that it is structured by doctrinal concerns – can actually be taken as support for the notion that Buddhism retained a strong memory of the experiential purport of the original teachings. Arguably, the great weight attributed to meditation reflects a true aspect of the tradition's self-identity. The focus on meditative experience did not spring up *deus ex machina* but reflects the fundamental Buddhist perception of the Buddha, or better, it preserves the Buddha's

[116] P. 115, emphasis in the original. Although Gyatso rejects the view that central (meditative) experiences sought by the Tibetan tradition are unmediated, Klein (1992) has shown that this tradition was aware of the complexity of achieving a truly unconditioned state. Klein presents a detailed analysis of the way both the *rnying-ma-pa* and the *dge-lug-pa* traditions developed complex explanations for the way a conditioned mind can attain a realization of a fully unconditioned, unmediated state.

perception of himself. The emphasis on *jhāna* in the early texts clearly supports the formational role of meditative experience, which was so easy to revive in the twentieth century. This is not to deny that many Buddhist scholiasts studied and classified the descriptions of meditative states according to elaborate conceptual schemes without ever experiencing them for themselves or that others studied their words merely intellectually.[117] But the fact that such a conceptual analysis of meditative experience was felt to be an important concern of the tradition attests that these experiences were fundamental to its logic and to the way it understood itself.

Targeting the idealistic tendency in the postulation of "experience," Sharf labors the distinction between "study" and "experience." By doing so, he misrepresents the role of study and abstracts the concept of experience. We must realize that when a monk or nun studies Buddhist doctrine for most of his or her lifetime, the structure of their experience is transformed accordingly; study transforms the mind. Once experience has been affected by study – indeed, a prescriptive religious function – students of religious doctrine can then experience the internalized meanings of their study more fully if they ever make an attempt to practice meditation. But their "experience" is deeply affected even if they do not. To take an example, lifelong study of and reflection in the doctrine of impermanence changes one's heart. Thus, the sharp boundary between doctrine and meditation evaporates, and the "realized" practitioner and the less ambitious student of doctrine appear as different points on the same spectrum. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this understanding of the fundamental relationship between religious thought and the structure of experience was foundational to the early Buddhist path and to its theory of meditation.

The present work may be seen as complementing Gyatso's responses to Sharf from the perspective of early Buddhism and as substantiating and enhancing the role of experience in the understanding of Buddhism. I deeply agree, however, with Sharf and Gyatso that the view of experience as "pure" or non-mediated is misguided. I also follow these two scholars in accepting that for the majority of Buddhists throughout history, the meditative experiences which comprise the peaks of the Buddhist path were not much more than fables. Nevertheless, these peaks did (and probably still do) exist and were fundamental to the shape of Buddhist identity, belief, doctrine, and ritual. While these peaks are rarely the same peaks, varying between and within traditions, they nonetheless provide

[117] Sharf (1995: 238).

Buddhism with a forceful *raison d'être*, and the Buddhist tradition can be defined, at least from this point of view, as the spelling out of their significance. When the earliest Buddhist tradition emphasized that realization occurs in deep meditation and when the notion of "liberation" is as central to the tradition as it is, the role of "experience" as a main source of the Buddhist tradition is inevitably underscored, even if this involves a fair amount of optimism on the part of many Buddhist students through the ages.

This discussion bears on an interesting article by Eli Franco (2009), who in many ways continued the thread begun by Sharf. Franco discusses the relationship between meditation and metaphysics in Buddhism and takes issue with the scholarly perception that Buddhist metaphysical theories had their origin in meditative insights. This paradigm was originally conceptualized by Schmithausen (1973; 1976), who argued that the Yogācāra idea of "mind-only" emerged from meditative experiences that discovered that meditative objects are nothing but imagination. Franco shows that although there are Buddhist philosophical theories that conform to the pattern of generalizing from meditative experience to metaphysics – such as the correspondence thought to exist between the *jhānas* and cosmology[118] – there are also contradictory cases, such as the Sarvāstivādin "everything exits" doctrine, which approves of the eternal existence of past and future objects and the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent-origination), which Schmithausen (2000) has shown to have been put together from different sources.[119] These doctrines result, Franco rightly argues, from different incentives and should not be seen as direct generalizations of meditative experiences into philosophical truths.

As with Sharf's argument, although I agree with Franco's basic point, I fear that he has gone one step too far. While Buddhist philosophical theories may not be generalizations of meditative experience to all objects, this does not mean that meditative vision was not a powerful force in the generation of Buddhist thought. This is especially true of early Buddhism, where meditation was the workshop in which philosophical insights were examined, implemented, and reflected upon. Franco is obviously correct in

[118] On this theory see Gethin (1997).

[119] Regarding the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is of specific interest for the present study, Franco does not properly distinguish between the doctrinal formulation of the twelve links and the general principle of dependent-origination. The fact that the common textual presentation of the twelve links has a history does not mean that there is not a more basic insight at the base of the doctrine which may have begun as a meditative vision (these questions will be of primary importance in the following chapter).

his claim that many Buddhist metaphysical theories probably did not originate in meditative insights and that any rule of thumb on this issue would be simplistic. Nonetheless, this study will support the position that important parts of early Buddhist philosophy do stem from meditative experiences. At least regarding early Buddhist thought, we can identify a continuum between an initial meditative vision and an expanded philosophical presentation of it. In fact, I will show that the early texts define specific meditative perceptions, which eventually grew to become the central Buddhist philosophical theories; these texts are interested in techniques of meditative observation far more than they reflect on philosophical truths. This does not mean, however, that a simple process through which a meditative realization was considered to be true of (all) other contexts was necessarily at work here (as with that attributed to the *Yogācāra* "all is mind") or that such a process is inevitably the case for all Buddhist philosophical theories.

David Burton (2004: ch. 3) has raised another consideration regarding the role of experience in early Buddhism that is especially pertinent to our discussion. Burton supplies a philosophical analysis of the bold assertion that understanding Buddhist truth uproots craving and eradicates suffering. He concentrates on the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self and is troubled by the question of how it is that an understanding of these truths can have a true bearing on the immediacy of craving. While a certain diminishment in the power of craving due to such an understanding is reasonable, a full annihilation of craving that will lead to liberation appears unlikely to follow from a theoretical comprehension of impermanence. After all, many Buddhists, as well as many non-Buddhists for that matter, have understood and accepted the law of impermanence without it causing their liberation.

Burton's approach is different from the one that guides this study, and he admits that his work can be frustrating for the historically minded reader: his analysis consists of a philosophical grappling with formative Buddhist assertions and "thinking in a critically aware manner about fundamental issues and concepts in Buddhist thought" (p. 7). His conclusions are nonetheless of direct relevance to our theme.

Burton raises the distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance as a key to deciphering the Buddhist position regarding the attenuation of suffering through knowledge. While this distinction is promising, it still cannot fully explain away the conundrum, since un-awakened Buddhists possess knowledge by acquaintance of impermanence (pp. 32–36). Burton thus suggests that it is only a complete

and unremitting knowledge of impermanence that can be understood to fully contradict suffering. He suggests that the key to the system's coherence is by making room for an intense engagement with Buddhist knowledge that is afforded by meditative concentration. It is not enough to believe in the truth of the three characteristics, but

> One must also engage in systematic and sustained reflection on what one believes. . . . A particularly powerful opportunity for such reflection would take place in Buddhist meditation. . . . The repetitive attention to these truths in a concentrated state of mind might lead to a weakening and even the eradication of one's craving and attachment.[120]

Thus, according to Burton, in order for the early Buddhist path to make sense as a religious endeavor, the impact of meditative insight must be taken into account. The theoretical truths realized along the path are, in principle, available for everyone, but it is only the internalization of the understanding, achieved primarily in *samādhi*, which makes these transformative. This position works well with the way these doctrines are treated by the early texts.

The following section discusses the question of the historicity of the Pāli discourses that are at the base of this study. This question involves technical issues, the analysis of which may appear horribly dry to anyone who is not already perturbed by the problem. Readers who are willing to remain content with the position that we are discussing "the Buddha" not necessarily as an historical figure but possibly as the idealized hero of the Pāli discourses may be advised to skip to the beginning of the next chapter. Readers who would be interested in seeing why I think these discourses do represent the realities and practices of early generations of Buddhists, and possibly, to some degree at least, even of the Buddha himself, are advised to proceed unhampered by these apologies.

1.4 Methodological considerations: which texts will be relied on and why?

Scholars have grown suspicious of any claim regarding the historical Buddha. I, too, do not know what the Buddha taught, what his true words were, and what he had in mind when he uttered them; my vision of his teaching is structured by the texts, and as such he is inevitably no less a literary figure than a historical one. In this sense, borrowing from

[120] Burton (2004: 49).

Northrop Frye, we may prefer to see the Buddha as a mythological character, as the hero of the plots that shaped the Buddhist mind through the ages.[121] The texts, as well as their investigation, are also difficult to detach from creative and poetic impulses. Still, this literary, enlightened hero conveys in the early scriptures a remarkably rich and compelling body of teachings that are presented as the recorded words of the historical Buddha; any *a priori* wholesale denial of this claim is overly timid. Although there are vexing questions regarding the composition and the historicity of these materials, this is still one of the most faithful records we possess regarding the times of early Buddhism. Personally, I incline to see these texts as at least resonating the religious realities of the early Buddhist community, possibly even of the Buddha himself.

Gombrich (2009: ch. 7) has claimed that there is no such thing as methodology in the study of Buddhism and that scholars who believe in "methodological" considerations perform mediocre scholarship. Nevertheless, I find it important to explain (1) which texts this study relies on, (2) why I emphasize these texts, and (3) in what sense I believe these texts can represent early forms of Buddhism. This is important mainly because a number of leading scholars, most distinctly Gregory Schopen and Stephen Collins, have questioned the acceptance of the Pāli canon as an authentic record of the Buddhism of the Buddha.[122] Hence I wish to explicate what I believe a careful reading of the Pāli discourses teaches us about the practices and theories of the early Buddhist community, possibly even about the Buddha himself. Most importantly, I will explain why I believe that the textual passages central to my discussion are best understood as particularly old and reliable.

Briefly stated, I will argue that the central formulas of the seminal Buddhist doctrines, which appear in the discourses of the four major Nikāyas, are best seen as retaining a true memory of the Buddha's teachings.[123] How much this "memory" should be seen as reflecting the teachings of the historical Buddha will inevitably remain a matter of taste; the optimist will opt

[121] Frye (1983 [1982]: esp. p. 31, 1990: introduction).

[122] The heart of Schopen's position regarding the antiquity of the Pāli canon has been expressed in Schopen (1997: ch. 2, esp. section II, published originally in 1986). Schopen states that we ultimately possess no true idea regarding the contents of the Pāli canon prior to composition of the major commentaries in the fifth century CE. For a related argument, see Gombrich (1996: 9). Collins (1989) claims that the closure of the Pāli canon and its being put to writing relate to sectarian conflicts in Ceylonese Buddhism. He thus views the canon as part of attempts at self-legitimation of the Theravāda Mahāvihāra lineage. See also Wynne (2005: 35–39) for further exposition of the skeptical position regarding the antiquity and historicity of the Pāli materials.

[123] Geiger (1978 [1943]: 13): "The main body of the canon had at all events come into being in the first two centuries after the death of Buddha – *at a time when the memory of the Buddha was still fresh*" (emphasis mine).

for a strong degree of correspondence between the texts and the Buddha while the pessimist will forever remain unconvinced. Nonetheless, I incline to believe that the odds are in favor of viewing these main doctrinal articulations as reflections of prevalent Buddhist formulations from about a century or two after the death of the Buddha. Therefore, while they may not be a true representation of the Buddha's own words, they are probably *early enough* to relate something about what the founding master taught or at least to speak of the realities of the generations that followed him. This by no means implies that the texts can be taken in full as "the word of the Buddha." But it does suggest that a careful analysis can bring us back to early days of Buddhism. Perhaps some passages reflect the Buddha's own words to a certain extent, but this will become apparent only once we skin the doctrinal formulations of the meanings attributed to them during the development of Buddhist philosophy and orthodoxy. My contention will be that once the philosophical contents are defined in their more succinct form that predates their later theoretical elaborations, their fundamental compatibility and underlying coherence will be exposed. This coherence will itself be a good reason to support the case of the relative antiquity of the texts.

While Schopen and Collins have presented forceful articulations of the skeptical position regarding the acceptance of the Pāli discourses as historical documents, other authors have argued no less convincingly that the texts go back to very early phases of Buddhism.[124] A balanced approach regarding this crucial issue is the "middle-way position" put forward by the distinguished authority of J. W. de Jong (1993a, 1993b), a position I fully endorse as a guide for this study. In his article "The Buddha and his Teachings," de Jong states quite clearly that there can be no objective criterion that can serve to authenticate the early scriptures, as any criterion selected would inevitably start a vicious circle of unreliable assumptions (p. 171). De Jong is clear that we will never be able to develop

[124] For example, Oldenberg (1998 [1882]: part 1, ch. 1); Geiger (1978 [1943]: 9–13); Harvey (1995: 9); Bronkhorst (1998, 2009: 1–9); Gethin (1998: 42–44); Anālayo (2006: 33–38, 2008: 15–17, note specifically his discussion of the development of Bareau's views on the matter on p. 16); Gombrich (2009: ch. 7). Especially compelling are the arguments put forward by Wynne (2004: 116–124, 2005, 2007: ch. 1). Following Rhys Davids, Wynne marks the fact that the Pāli texts make no mention of Aśoka, which implies that the texts predate his rule. This argument was emphasized by Geiger (1978 [1943]: 11) as well. Following Norman, Wynne also points out that the texts seem to contain no Sinhalese additions (2005: 35–37) and that many well-known Buddhist stories were not inserted into the canon, presumably since it was already closed (2005: 46–47). Furthermore, basing himself on an argument in favor of the reliability of accounts regarding the expansion of Buddhism during the rule of Aśoka, Wynne suggests an early pre-Aśokan date for the closure of the canon (pp. 48–59).

a true representation of the historical Buddha's teachings (p. 174). Still, he is certain that it is possible to obtain "a true picture" of early Buddhism from the four Nikāyas.

In another essay on "The Beginnings of Buddhism," de Jong introduces what is probably the strongest argument advocated by the optimist camp – that there appears to be no major divergences between different early Buddhist schools and textual traditions in areas of central doctrinal importance. De Jong quotes Lance Cousins, who states that divergences between the versions of a particular sutta are "typically greatest in matters of little importance – such items as the location of suttas, the names of individual speakers, or the precise order of occurrence of events. Only very rarely are they founded on doctrinal or sectarian differences."[125] This argument regarding the basic doctrinal congruence between the versions of early discourses in texts preserved by distinct Buddhist schools, in different countries and languages, has been pointed out in a number of studies. Characteristic are the words of Lamotte (1988 [1958]):

> . . .[W]ith the exception of the Mahāyānist interpolations in the *Ekottara* [āgama], which are easily discernible, the variations in question affect hardly anything save the method of expression or the arrangement of the subjects. The doctrinal basis common to the āgamas and nikāyas is remarkably uniform.(p.156)

Lamotte's statements rely on a comparative analysis of the Chinese and Pāli textual traditions. Similar conclusions have been reached in a growing number of studies that have analyzed the relationship between texts preserved in Pāli, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Gāndhārī, from canons that belonged to the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Dharmagupta, and possibly the Mahāsaṅghika schools.[126] This observation regarding the correspondence between the doctrinal contents of the discourses is compelling and supports the view that the texts we read today

[125] De Jong (1993: 24).

[126] Lamotte (1988 [1958]: 156, quoted above); Minh Ciao (1991); Salomon (1997: ch. 1, 8); Anālayo (2005, 2005a: esp. 93–94, 2006: esp. 15–17, 2008: esp. 37–38, 2011), Glass (2005). See also Choong (2006, 2007), whose comparative analysis of the Pāli *Vangīsathera-saṃyutta* and *Bhikkhu-saṃyutta* with their Chinese counterparts caused him to identify significant doctrinal differences between the Chinese and Pāli versions of the same texts. A reading of Choong's translations and discussion though evidence that the differences are of the regular pattern identified by the other scholars referred to, in which the divergences between the texts pertain to minor details, in this case to technical, poetic, or scholastic (abhidharmic) matters.

Regarding the identification of the schools to which the different Chinese textual corpuses belong, see Anālayo (2010: 11–12). Regarding the Gāndhārī materials see Glass (2006: 1.2.5.3).

are closely related to their ancient counterparts. At the moment, a quite conservative approach would accept that the texts reflect a shared doctrinal understanding across cultures, languages, and schools prevalent during the first half of the second century CE, possibly even during the first century CE.[127]

In fact there is no true reason to assume that the materials we have before us are dissimilar to the canon that was committed to writing in the last quarter of the first century BCE.[128] In another authoritative study of the Pāli materials, K. R. Norman (1997) has stated that he believes there were no significant changes to the materials that comprise the Pāli canon after they were put to writing in the last quarter of the first century BCE.[129] It is also natural to assume a considerable degree of continuity between the earlier oral formation of the texts and their form preserved in writing.

Here is de Jong's full articulation of his middle-way methodological vision:

> Strictly speaking, the sceptics are certainly right. There is simply not enough evidence to reconstruct in their exact wording the doctrines of early Buddhism. However, there are many texts which agree in proclaiming again and again the same doctrines. It seems most likely that these doctrines originated in the early period of Buddhism. This point of view which has been called pragmatic, or conservative, or orthodox, or traditionalist by its opponents represents a middle way which avoids extreme points of view. It is not possible to believe in the homogeneity of the canonical texts in view of the contradictions found in them. Also, there is no doubt that they contain many later accretions. On the other hand, *it would be hypercritical to assert that nothing can be said about the doctrine of earliest Buddhism*. We cannot read the mind of the Buddha but he would not have been venerated as the founder of Buddhism if he had not made a great impact on his hearers by his teaching. The basic ideas of Buddhism as found in the canonical writings could very well have been proclaimed by him,

[127] These dates are achieved from the dating of Gāndhārī materials, for which see Salomon (2003: 77) and Glass (2006: 2).

[128] This date is commonly accepted for the first written redaction of the Pāli Tipiṭaka. Skilling (2009: 59–63) emphasizes that each Buddhist school went through its own processes of writing down and redacting its canon, a process that involved numerous *saṃgītis*. Nonetheless, taking into account the evidence from Gāndhārī Pāli, and Tibetan testimonies, he believes that "we may suggest that the Piṭakas were compiled and were written down in different scripts and formats, in the Northwest of India and in Sri Lanka, by about the beginning of the Christian Era, or earlier."

[129] This is a major theme of chapter 5 of Norman's book to which he returns in chapter 9, pp. 140 and 146.

> transmitted and developed by his disciples and, finally, codified in fixed formulas. (p. 25, emphasis mine)[130]

No serious scholar will claim today that the texts of the Pāli canon can be seen as a reliable expression of the true words spoken by the historical Buddha. The texts are too full of contradictions, too standardized, and too repetitious to be viewed as voiced by one and the same author. At the same time, it seems no less than awkward to assume that the texts do not reflect the Buddha's words in any way. This is particularly true since we have no real reason to assume that the texts *do not* date to a very early period.[131] It thus appears reasonable to believe that that central structure of the discourses that constitute the main bulk of the *Sutta-piṭaka* dates back to the first few hundred years of Buddhism.

The question is when it precisely was that the main body of discourses was structured, given the scarcity of hard facts in the study of Indian history of this period.[132] Here there appears to be a growing consensus that a reliable point of time would be between the second and third Buddhist councils that occurred around 70 and 150 years after the Buddha's death, respectively.[133] Notable among the scholars who voiced such an opinion is K. R. Norman. In his *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, Norman focuses on the second and third councils as events in which the Pāli Nikāyas were structured.[134] It is at these events that the recital tradition

130 See also the statement by Geiger (1978 [1943]: 12): "It will be clear from what has been said above in what sense we can speak of the authenticity of the canon. None will claim today that all that is contained in it is derived from Buddha himself. But without doubt it contains a mass of utterances, speeches and teachings of the Master, as they were impressed on the memory of the disciples in their more or less accurate form."

131 The only positive argument against the antiquity of the Pāli materials is the reference to the seven texts in Aśoka's Bhābrā edict, which are not found in the Pāli canon in the same form (see Schopen [1997: 24–25]; see also the less severe assessment of the problem in Schmithausen [1992: 2.1]). As has been remarked by Lamotte (1988 [1958]: 235–237) and echoed by Wynne (2004: 199), the difference between the titles of the texts – the main argument regarding the discrepancy between the edict and the canon – is insignificant. It is also doubtful whether Aśoka had an intimate acquaintance with the Buddhist scriptural corpus of his day. While the skeptic may also turn to arguments regarding the oral nature of the canon and the different linguistic changes it underwent, such as Sanskritization or translation into and out of Pāli (e.g. von Hinüber [1996: 5]), these too appear not to have significantly altered the contents of the texts, and certainly not those of primary doctrinal importance. See, for instance, Norman (1983: 2–7, 1989: 54–55, 1997: ch. 3, 6); Allon (1997); and Wynne (2004).

132 Samuel (2008: ch. 2).

133 A convincing account regarding the dating of the second and third councils was presented by Cousins (1992), who suggests 70–80 years between the death of the Buddha and the second council, and an equal interval between the second and third councils. Norman (1997: 139) dates the second and third council to 60 and 150 after the Buddha's death, respectively.

134 See also Oldenberg (1998 [1882]: 75); Clark (1930: 134); Ergard (1976: 2); and Gethin (1998: 42).

of the *bhāṇakas* was established, these being the people responsible for carrying on the tradition. In fact, Norman believes that the roots of the *bhāṇaka* traditions precede the councils and that the councils provided legitimizing authority for them.[135] Norman further adds that linguistic considerations demonstrate that significant portions of the canon are pre-Aśokan.[136]

The heart of Norman's view of the historical processes that gave shape to the canon relies on the strong degree of homogenization within and between the different reciting (*bhāṇaka*) traditions. Norman speaks of a process by which the language of the texts was homogenized to achieve a surprisingly consistent form. This strong degree of correlation between the language of the different Nikāyas excludes the possibility that the texts were established in their known form at the time of the first council after the Buddha's death. Basing himself on linguistic, inscriptional, and textual evidence, Norman believes that the *bhāṇaka* traditions were set after the second recitation (*saṃgīti*) or even as late as the third recitation.[137] He also believes that the closure of certain portions of the canon can be dated to the second and third recitation (pp. 139–140). Geiger (1978 [1943]: 9) too accepts that "At the third council under King Asoka (264 to 227 BCE) the canon in all its essential parts seems to have been brought to a formal completion." Geiger sees the formation of the canon as a gradual process that occurred during the first two centuries after the Buddha's death (p. 13).[138]

Norman's views on these matters are corroborated by Anālayo's more recent discussions of the relationship between the Chinese Āgamas and

[135] The heart of Norman's position on this matter is expressed in chapter 3 of his book.

[136] See chapter 4 of Norman's book.

[137] Pp. 44–47. In making this judgment, Norman relies on Sinhalese inscriptions that mention the word *baṇaka* from the second century BCE and on references to the second recitation, but not to the third, that appear within the canon. See also chapter 8 of Norman's book.

[138] While the event of the third council suggests itself as an important moment in the structuring of the Buddhist canon, Skilling (2009: 55–60) convincingly shows that although the first and second councils appear to have been pan-*saṃgha* events, the third council was conducted by different Buddhist traditions on their own. The third council thus appears as an important event in the generation of a sense of self-identity of Buddhist schools. Skilling notes that the Pāli description of the councils "is artificial and unconvincing" (p. 56), a view that resonates with much of the earlier scholarship on the councils (for a summary, see Prebish [1974]). Nevertheless, he has no doubt that the councils occurred, but rather suggests "that there were more – perhaps many more *saṃgīti* than we have record of" (p. 59). This does not mean, though, that the texts were redacted in a haphazard way, since it is clear that the different traditions were conscious of the delicacy of the redactional process and took measure to assure the fidelity of the tradition. Skilling also quotes La Vallée Poussin's impression of a Buddhist "Catholicism" that "secured the redaction and the compilation of Canons of scriptures very like one another."

the Pāli Nikāyas. Anālayo's analysis of the correspondence between the different textual corpuses shows that the structuring of the Āgamas is similar to that of the Nikāyas. Anālayo shows that the connection between the two corpuses is strong enough to suggest that they stem from the same source. The degree of correlation between the two traditions recommends the view that the canon was at least taking shape before the schools split from each other.[139]

Although Norman is clear that he believes that the final closure of the canon was effected only in the days of Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE, he is also convinced that there were only minimal changes to the body of the canon after it was put into writing at the end of the first century BCE.[140] Norman also believes that the main textual structures and their methods of preservation by recitation were instituted by the third council at around the year 250 BCE. It seems reasonable to connect these two dates and suggest that major parts of the Buddhist texts we are familiar with today go back to such an early date in the life of the Buddhist community.[141] The establishing of the *bhāṇaka* tradition during the second or third councils lead to the development of a standardized body of texts that was later put to writing. Gethin (2001 [1992]: 15) is also inclined to accept such a position.

But what is it precisely that goes back to these very ancient times? A strong word of caution must be made at this point. If the focus of this study were sociological, for instance, if we were interested in the daily lives of Buddhist monks during the first few centuries BCE, the above presentation would be almost irrelevant. In such matters it is clear that the texts are heavily influenced by the traditions that preserved them.[142] It is

139 Anālayo (2008: 37): "While it cannot be excluded that such similarities are a product of chance, they are striking enough and one would not expect to come across such similarities unless the basic four-fold division into four Nikāyas or Āgamas stems from a common source." See also Norman (1983: 31): "In the Sanskrit canons the *āgamas* are named Dīrgha-, Madhyama-, Saṃyukta- and Ekottarika-, and the close similarity to the Pāli names indicates that the collections had begun to be formed while the schools were still in contact, i.e. before the schisms which started after the second council."

140 Ibid. A central argument in this regard is that the process of Sanskritization of the texts was stopped in the middle (see chapter 6 of Norman's book). Bechert (1992: 45) gives the uncommon earlier dates of 89–77 BCE for the reign of Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya and for the committing of the canon to writing. Most scholars date Vaṭṭagāmaṇi to 29–17 BCE.

141 Hartmann (2006: 97) believes that the wording of a well-known passage about the writing down of the canon from the *Dīpavaṃsa* "appears to presuppose an already well-structured canon with commentary." Bechert (1992) argues that not so much can be gained from this same passage.

142 This is a major theme in the comparative studies of the Chinese and Pāli textual materials as texts were adapted to suit the norms of the culture and tradition they express. See, for instance, the removal of the *Jīvaka-sutta* of the MN from the Chinese Sarvāstivāda *Madhyama-Āgama*

precisely regarding such details that scholars have identified important patterns of divergence between the extant textual traditions. It is mainly regarding the central doctrinal positions of the tradition that we can afford to suggest that the Pāli discourses represent some of the earliest forms of Buddhism. Although some scholars may view precisely these formulations as suspect, being particularly important to the tradition and thus possibly suffering from manipulation that forced them to voice evolved perceptions of the Buddha's message, this study will explore the opposite position, which allows for the possibility that due to the central importance of these formulas, coupled with the great reverence of the tradition toward the word of the Buddha, these statements *may* even return to the Buddha himself.[143] As stated above, I believe that the choice on this matter is personal and I support the many voices who have taught us to be suspicious of the texts. Nevertheless, I also find it irresponsible not to allow for the option that we will be speaking of Buddhist perceptions of truth that return to a very early date.

It is important in this regard to state the relevance of the present study for the methodological consideration presented here. A major problem regarding the perceived authenticity of the early Pāli materials is the contradictions identified in and between Pāli texts. In the context of the present study these include the distinct paths to liberation and the divergent philosophical perceptions defined as foundational in the texts. As stated above, the effects of this study are highly integrative. This study aims to show not only how philosophy and meditation relate to each other, but also how central philosophical teachings boil down to much the same meditative perceptions. Here I will be relying on the most common articulation of the doctrine of the four noble truths in the Nikāyas (*idaṃ saccam*, etc.), which is the way the doctrine is articulated in nearly all the texts that present it. As I will show, this formula has been severely misunderstood until now. I will further show that this earlier formula of the four noble truths is similar, indeed almost identical, to the central formulation of the doctrine of dependent-origination (*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*, etc.). These doctrines also form the basis of the doctrine of karma and correspond to at least central aspects of the doctrine of selflessness as well.

since this text permits the consumption of meat. See Minh Ciau (1991: ch. 3) and Anālayo (2008a).

143 Regarding the strong Buddhist motivation for a sincere transmission of the teachings of the founding master, see Geiger (1978 [1942]: 13) and Skilling (2009: 54–55, 59), as well as Hamilton (2003: 3–4).

Thus, when the coherence of the teachings will be exposed, their reliability as historical documents will be enhanced.

Following the lead of a number of other scholars, this study will focus on the texts preserved in the four major Nikāyas (DN, MN, SN, AN).[144] While these traditions are in no way uniform,[145] they still present a markedly consistent textual corpus. The fifth *Khuddaka-Nikāya* (KN) will largely remain outside the scope of this study and will be referred to only in cases when specific texts resonate clearly with the ones that are central to the discussion. The choice not to include the texts of the KN, including the portions of the *Sutta-nipāta* deemed by many scholars as the most ancient textual records that exist in the Buddhist tradition,[146] is both a practical one and a matter of principal. The nature and antiquity of the majority of the texts in the KN is debatable,[147] and the latter reflect a distinct genre in early Buddhist literature. Many of these texts are ancient Buddhist poetry whose literary motivations are clearly distant from the ones that produced the more institutionally oriented central four Nikāyas.[148] While some of the materials in the KN may be older than the ones I will be discussing, their aesthetic effect is more difficult to subject to analytic inquiry. I thus find it important to unearth the structural visions of the most central and straightforward Buddhist tradition, the prose discourses of the major four Nikāyas, which will hopefully allow for a later discussion of their relationship to the rich traditions of the KN. For similar considerations, commentarial and Abhidhammic materials will generally not be treated as well as they reflect a later stage in which the discourses were subject to doctrinal classification. While these scriptures can clearly teach us much about the context in which the early discourses were studied, they would deny us a direct encounter with the early discourses themselves.

In summary, it is important to restate my main position regarding the historicity of the Pāli discourses. Almost certainly, no one will ever know precisely when the discourses were composed and to what degree they express the words and thoughts of the historical Buddha. This does not mean, however, that intense skepticism breeds more serious scholarship. A sober appraisal of the material we possess today suggests that it goes back

144 E.g. Harvey (1995: 9–12); Hamilton (1996: xvii–xx).
145 According to Norman (1997: 45–46), the *bhāṇaka* traditions differed from each other on some interpretations of Buddhist history or doctrine and in the contents of specific suttas. See also Schmithausen (1981: notes 15, 55, 69).
146 Gomez (1976: esp. note 10); Nakamura (1980: 165); Norman (1983: 63); Vetter (1988: appendix, 1990).
147 Lamotte (1988 [1958]: 150), Norman (1983: 95–97).
148 Shulman (forthcoming).

to early generations of Buddhists, possibly to the first or second century after the Buddha. Just how early the texts are will ultimately remain a matter of personal opinion. Mine is that *parts* of the materials reflect the thought culture of very early forms of Buddhism. *Reflections* are not realities, however. I am content to offer my readers a revisionary, textually based account of the philosophical teachings in the major four Nikāyas. The literary figure who taught these discourses, "the Buddha," is made probably of both myth and history.

CHAPTER 2

A Philosophy of Being Human

The previous chapter identified the need to integrate philosophy and meditation and to reconcile the two in light of the early textual descriptions of the process of awakening. This is because the central articulations of the awakening of the Buddha or of his disciples are consistent in stating that liberation is effected by the destruction of inflows (*āsava*) through wisdom or knowledge (*paññā*, *ñāṇa*) in *samādhi* meditation. This chapter will take a second step toward understanding the functioning of early Buddhist philosophy in *samādhi* by demonstrating that at this stage of Buddhist thought, central philosophical doctrines entertained almost no interest in the nature of external objects and the external world or in abstract notions of existence. More precisely, early Buddhist philosophy retained an interest in these only so far as they were helpful in explaining the nature of human existence and in enhancing the understanding of human subjectivity. Early Buddhist philosophy concerned itself mainly with conscious experience, and its primary objects of scrutiny were mental events. To early Buddhism, philosophy was first of all an attempt to reassess what passes in the mind and to generate a stance toward the elements of subjective experience that would be conducive to liberation. It is this philosophy whose main aim is to teach the practitioner a correct way of analyzing and reacting to the events he observes in his mind that reaches its peak when it is implemented in *samādhi*.

This does not mean, however, that early Buddhist philosophy was not concerned with metaphysics. Quite the contrary is the case, in fact, in contradiction to large strands of modern scholarship on the Buddha. Buddhism relied from the start on the concept of liberation – a heavily metaphysical notion that itself rests on deep, underlying assumptions regarding the vanity of existence. Moreover, if these assumptions were ever verified it was only through the mediums of personal, probably meditative, visionary experience. Another metaphysical notion at the heart of the teaching is the idea of rebirth, or at the very least of indefinite, dense conditioning. If one intends to correct human

destiny so as to stop processes of conditioning that have been evolving for many lifetimes, he is participating in a rich metaphysical system. The philosophical focus of early Buddhism was indeed on experience, and in this sense, early Buddhist thought had a strong psychological inclination, but the goal was to remedy a metaphysical illness by psychological means. Here, "non-attachment" affects much more than the here-and-now.

The theme regarding the focus on experience in early Buddhist philosophy has already received a fair amount of scholarly attention and to some extent could be seen as common knowledge. Nevertheless, nearly all scholars who make such claims continue to view the doctrines of dependent-origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and of selflessness (*anatta*) as pointing to the ubiquitous, ontological truths of conditionality and essencelessness, respectively, and thus the psychological and soteriological character of these doctrines remains relatively untreated. This chapter will therefore aim to point out the early meaning of these doctrines, which made claims *only* about the events that constitute human subjectivity and their repercussions in determining rebirth.

The following discussion will correspond to some degree with Sue Hamilton's *Early Buddhism: A New Approach*, which is the strongest articulation I am familiar with of the position that early Buddhist philosophy was concerned primarily with experience. Hamilton highlights two main points: first, this philosophical system was interested in subjective, rather than in objective, phenomena; second, it aimed at understanding how phenomena work, rather than what they are. Hamilton's focus is mainly on the doctrines of selflessness and of dependent-origination, the same doctrines that will concern us in this chapter.

While I endorse a great part of Hamilton's conclusions, mainly those that involve the definition of early Buddhist philosophy as concentrating on the study of subjective experience, this chapter diverges from her analysis in three significant ways. First, the metaphysical assumptions behind the philosophy of experience will be reflected upon. Second, the heart of Hamilton's method is a theoretical analysis of the conditions under which the early Buddhist teachings can be seen to be most cogent and reasonable.[1] My approach is more textual as I wish to offer a close reading of the literary presentation of the early Buddhist doctrines.

[1] P. 9: "In light of all this, and given my own confusion, I felt that it might be legitimately productive to try and draw out some of the ideas from the teachings as given in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and see if they might be understood coherently and if one might suggest what they mean in terms that make sense. In doing so, I also hoped that the place of early Buddhist thought in the history of ideas might more readily be apparent."

A careful reading of these texts shows that their main interest is in mental processes and in the realities they generate. This is primarily true with regard to the doctrine of dependent-origination, which, in stark contrast to the way it is normally understood, including by Hamilton, is *not* at this stage a general law of dependence or conditionality but rather a law that focuses on the dynamics of human subjectivity. Similarly, the main aim of the *anatta* doctrine is not to advance a general understanding regarding the selflessness of all things – things are not said to lack a self *of their own* – but rather to show that they are selfless in the sense of being "not-*my*-self" or "not-I." While perceptions of dependent-origination and of selflessness as a characterization of the nature of "things" surely became prominent in later Buddhist philosophical traditions, these more theoretical meanings are alien to the logic of the doctrines as they are introduced by the early texts.

My understanding of the early teachings diverges from Hamilton's approach in one last significant way. Hamilton argues that early Buddhist philosophy was interested in how things function, rather than in what they are. In contrast, I believe that the early Buddhist system of thought was concerned with the "what" just as much it was with the "how." In describing things as being "not-I," for instance, the Buddha was concerned just as much with the character of mental events as with how they take place. Moreover, it is precisely the perception of the nature of these events "as they are" that is meant to lead the Buddha's students toward the transformative goal of detachment: because something, including my own body for instance, is ontologically "not-my-self" (*anatta*), one learns that being bound to it makes little sense. This shows that the Buddha clearly endorsed a philosophy that contained important ontological and metaphysical premises yet these aspects of his teaching served to enhance his students' capacity for subjective reflection; this capacity would then catalyze their ability to respond to their experiences in a way he deemed healthy.

Before proceeding to analyze the doctrines of selflessness and dependent-origination directly, I will begin the presentation of the Buddha's positive philosophical positions by discussing the well-known theme of the ten "unanswered" (*avyākata*) or so-called "metaphysical" questions, which have often been taken to provide a framework for the discussion of the Buddha's approach to philosophy. Like the other doctrines mentioned, the true focus of these questions has been consistently misrepresented. Under a close reading, we will see that the Buddha did endorse a powerful metaphysical position regarding these questions, but here too the main purport of his position reflects on the nature of subjective existence and the nature of the self.

2.1 Did the Buddha eschew metaphysics?

The set of ten philosophical questions posed on different occasions to the Buddha, questions which in certain instances he refrained from answering, has long been taken as evidence that the Buddha entertained no interest in philosophy or in metaphysics, or at least that he had no motivation to teach them.[2] At times, this shying away from answering what appear at first sight to be metaphysical questions has led scholars to regard the Buddha's philosophical interests as wholly pragmatic.[3] The Buddha is thus portrayed as a skilled teacher interested only in what will advance his disciples' spiritual progress; this supposedly excludes philosophical speculation.

The paradigmatic example of the Buddha's negative stance regarding the possibility of conducting metaphysical discussions is his discourse to Māluṅkya, which introduces the famous simile of the arrow.[4] In this classic story the Buddha is challenged by his disciple Māluṅkya, who says he will not carry out his practice until the Buddha shares his understanding regarding a set of ten questions: (1–2) Is the world eternal (*nicca*) / not-eternal (or impermanent, *anicca*)? (3–4) Does the world have an end (*anta*) / no-end? (5–6) Are the living force (*jīva*) and the body (*sarīra*) one and the same/distinct? (7–10) Does the *Tathāgata* exist / not-exist / both / neither after death?[5] The Buddha replies that he never promised answers to questions of this sort, which in no way bring a man closer to his spiritual ends. Māluṅkya is acting, the Buddha says, like a man shot by a poisoned arrow who will not allow his well-wishers to extract the arrow from his body until he is given answers to a long list of questions regarding the person who shot him, the bow and arrow he used, etc.

In this particular discourse, the Buddha avoids answering these ostensibly metaphysical questions, and the reasoning he supplies suggests that his motives are pragmatic – he only wishes to direct his student toward enlightenment. But in most other instances in which the Buddha is approached with this same set of questions, his response is different: usually he says that he does not adhere to the ten views articulated rather

[2] The ten questions or views have consistently been seen as metaphysical. For a convenient summary of leading scholarly positions, see Cabezón (1994: ch. 9, esp. 176–77). See also La Vallée Poussin (1982 [1917]: 128–32); Edgerton (1959); Hamilton (1996: xxiv–xxv); and Ronkin (2005: 4–5). Notice that at times the list of ten is lengthened to fourteen when the first two sets of questions include not only the positive and negative options but those of "both and neither" as well.

[3] See for example Cabezón (1994: ch. 9); Gombrich (2009: ch. 11).

[4] This is the *Cūḷamāluṅkyaputta-sutta* ("The short discourse to Māluṅkyaputta"), MN 63, I.426–33.

[5] Questions 7–10 could also be translated as if after death the Buddha "comes into being" (*hoti*, Skt *bhavati*).

than refraining from answering the questions at all. In these cases it is evident that the Buddha does hold a philosophical position that has metaphysical commitments, albeit a negative one. A negative answer may be less assertive than a positive one, but it still is an answer, which evidences that the Buddha does endorse a theoretical stance regarding these ten views. His choice not to elaborate on his understanding in the particular instance of his discourse to Māluṅkya may have a pragmatic motivation, but this in no way captures the whole of his approach to philosophy or to the views expressed in the ten questions.

In the oft-quoted *Aggivacchagotta-sutta* of the MN[6] the Buddha explains why he believes the views encapsulated by the ten questions are mistaken. After the Buddha states that he holds none of these views, the baffled mendicant Vacchagotta asks him how this can be. The Buddha first says:

> This reliance on the view (*diṭṭhigata*)[7] "the world is eternal" is a grasping at a view, a wilderness of a view, a restlessness of a view, a quivering of a view, a bond of a view, which is accompanied by pain, strife, unrest and distress, which is not conducive to detachment, to dispassion, to cessation, to quieting, to realization, to enlightenment, to nibbāna.[8]

The Buddha then repeats this same statement regarding the other nine views put forward by Vacchagotta; adhering to any of these views is definitively seen by him to be problematic in the sense that it is both painful and spiritually disadvantageous. This does not imply, however, that there is no philosophical understanding behind his position. Indeed, when the perplexed Vacchagotta continues to question if "for Gotama, sir, is there any reliance on a view?"[9] The Buddha replies:

> This reliance on views, Vaccha, is removed for the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata has indeed (*hi*) seen (*diṭṭha*) this: "form," "arising of form," "passing away of form"; "sensations," "arising of sensations," "passing away of sensations"; "perceptions," "arising of perceptions," "passing away of perceptions"; "formations," "arising of formations," "passing away of for mations"; "consciousness," "arising of consciousness," "passing away of consciousness." Therefore, following the destruction of, the dispassion

[6] "The discourse to Vacchagotta about [the simile of] the fire," MN 72, I.483–489. Robinson (1972: 316) sees it as a synthetic composition of the theme of the unanswered questions.

[7] Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 592) translate *diṭṭhigata* as "speculative view." *Gata* gives a meaning of reliance on or adherence to.

[8] *'Sassato loko'ti kho, vaccha, diṭṭhigatam etaṃ diṭṭhigahanaṃ diṭṭhikantāro diṭṭhivisūkaṃ diṭṭhivipphanditaṃ diṭṭhisaṃyojanaṃ sadukkhaṃ savighātaṃ saupāyāsaṃ sapariḷāhaṃ, na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati.*

[9] *Atthi pana bhoto gotamassa kiñci diṭṭhigatan'ti.*

> toward, the cessation of, the abandoning of, the forsaking of, the unarising of all thought of self,[10] of all mental disturbance, of all the underlying tendency to the pride of I and mine, the Tathāgata, I say, is liberated.[11]

The Buddha describes a personal perception of impermanence, possibly a meditative one, he experienced as liberating – the five aggregates are seen to arise and cease. This statement contains both experiential and soteriological elements yet the point is squarely philosophical: no view is to be adhered to since views discord with the Buddha's understanding, or experience, of reality. Experienced reality – that is the five aggregates (see below) – is thoroughly impermanent, coming into being and passing away incessantly. Because he has "seen" (*diṭṭha*, note the word play with *diṭṭhi*, "view") the recalcitrant truth of impermanence, he realizes that no view can prevail.[12] This is nothing but concrete, forceful, philosophical reasoning: everything one perceives is ephemeral and hence no view can capture the nature of reality.[13] In this sense, the Buddha denies the ten views through affirming the view of impermanence although the latter is said to be an experiential realization – it was "seen" – rather than being merely speculative.

The Buddha's eschewal of the ten views raises other interesting philosophical questions. First, if these views are not considered to be supplanted by another that verifies impermanence, the Buddha should probably still be said to hold a philosophical position of "no-view."[14] Furthermore, the

[10] *Maññita* is the past participle of the verb *maññati*, literally "to think." In many instances (for example, Snip 799, 842, 915), *maññati* conveys the meaning of "to think of oneself," a meaning that fits well with the denial *ahaṃkāra* and *mamakāra* here.

[11] *Diṭṭhigatanti kho, vaccha, apanītam etaṃ tathāgatassa. Diṭṭhañ hetaṃ, Vaccha, tathāgatena – 'iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo; iti vedanā, iti vedanāya samudayo, iti vedanāya atthaṅgamo; iti saññā, iti saññāya samudayo, iti saññāya atthaṅgamo; iti saṅkhārā, iti saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo, iti saṅkhārānaṃ atthaṅgamo; iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo'ti. Tasmā tathāgato sabbamaññitānaṃ sabbamathitānaṃ sabbaahaṃkāramamamakāramānānusayānaṃ khayā virāgā nirodhā cāgā paṭinissaggā anupādā vimuttoti vadāmīti*

The translation of this passage is tricky since the text uses *iti* – normally employed as quotation marks – in order to signify the perceptual object's "form," "the arising of form," etc. Therefore, a translation that would mark the *iti* by "this," or, as in Ñāṇamoḷī and Bodhi (1995: 592): "Such is material form, etc." is also acceptable. I read this use of the *iti* as a specification not of a verbal statement but of a moment of perception.

[12] See also Anālayo (2009a: 184).

[13] This reading corresponds to some degree with Gethin's (1998: 66–68) understanding that the questions are left unanswered since they cannot be answered, an understanding he believes is representative of the way the story was perceived in the Buddhist tradition. See also Collins (1982: 4.2.1).

[14] Collins (1982: 3.1), and more recently Fuller (2005), have discussed the place of the "no-view" position in the Buddhist path. These studies suggest that earlier stages of training rely on Buddhist views of truth while the path can be said to culminate in a full realization of the no-view stance. The no-view interpretation of Buddhist realization finds expression, however, almost exclusively in the

Buddha's claim that no view can capture the truth about reality reflects an important assumption at the base of his thinking: the Buddha is certain that the way he knows and experiences the world reveals its ultimate nature. Because he has seen the evanescence of the aggregates, he knows these views are mistaken.

The Buddha therefore should not be thought to shun philosophy although he does express a conviction that the ten views are unfounded. He presents a tricky philosophical position reminiscent of classic paradoxes such as the paradox of the liar: once the Buddha's fundamental perception of radical impermanence is accepted, there is no room for further philosophizing (unless, that is, one disagrees with the way he offers to put his philosophy into practice and by effecting radical detachment that will uproot the process of rebirth). One could still argue with the uncompromising positing of radical impermanence or with the methodological assumption that insights gained through personal reflection relate the very structure of reality. In any case, if it still be maintained that the Buddha does deny philosophy, he does so philosophically, and the dismissal of philosophy comes about only after a philosophically mature conviction regarding the truth of impermanence has been achieved.

Why is it then that the Buddha does not accept the position that "the world is non-eternal (*anicca*)"? Here we realize that the problem is still more subtle since the views the Buddha denies should be characterized as "speculative" only very loosely, and their refutation implies no negation of metaphysics. In this respect, it is crucial to understand that the term *loka* – "the world," which is the focus of the first four questions and which elicits more conventional metaphysical meanings – is far removed from our intuitive, modernized view that must accommodate "the world" as it is seen from the outside in the weather forecast. Here "the world" is not planet earth or the universe but rather the world of human experience or the world *as experienced*. Thus, the "unanswered questions" are not concerned with theoretical notions regarding the nature of the external world but with questions about the possibility of life after death, most notably about the reality that the spiritually realized attain after they die. When Māluṅkya or Vacchagotta pose their inquiries, they are actually asking about the goals of the practice in which the Buddha is guiding them

AV and has little support in the central four Nikāyas. The AV's approach to the relinquishing of views could be said to be more pragmatic than philosophical and does not characterize the whole of the text. This text's relationship to the thought of the Nikāyas is also anything but straightforward. Verses from the AV such as Snip 882, in which the Buddha calls people who hold views "stupid" (*bālā*), suggest, once again, that the no-view approach is a view in itself. For a broader perspective on these issues in the AV, see Norman (1992) and Shulman (forthcoming).

and about the realities they can expect after they die if they are to succeed. This is why the Buddha rejects the view that "the world is non-eternal" together with the other positions, as this view merely expresses the idea that there is absolutely nothing after death.

The question regarding the place or state one is reborn in after death was obviously of pivotal importance to the religious communities of ancient India. These interests form much of the body of Upaniṣadic doctrine and crop up many times in the Buddhist texts as well.[15] Fundamental for our concerns is that the last four questions in the list of ten views – whether the Tathāgata exists, does not-exist, both or neither, after he dies – deal directly with the state that the realized ones achieve at the end of their lives. In fact, in the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, after the Buddha denies that he holds any of the ten views, the discussion continues to reflect only on these last four questions, which prove to be the heart of Vacchagotta's inquiry. It is in this context that the Buddha introduces the well-known simile of fire, which contributes to the title of the discourse. Just like fire, which cannot be said to travel to any direction after the material that feeds it is exhausted, the Buddha has quit feeding the human fire of the aggregates and thus, after he passes away, there is no way by which he can be said to be reborn (*upapajjati*) / not-reborn / both / neither.[16] For him the aggregates are "forsaken, their root severed, made like an uprooted palm-tree, eradicated with no future arising."[17] Therefore, he cannot be known through them

[15] For Upaniṣadic interest in rebirth, see, for instance *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.3–10 or 6.11. For further discussion of this theme in the Upaniṣads, see Hull (1990 [1989]) and Freedman (2011). Buddhism's interest in rebirth or in preventing it is well known. See for instance the knowledge of former births and of the mechanics of karma that form the first two of the three knowledge-events that are part of awakening, discussed in section 1.1. See also the ideal introduced in such places as the final verse of the *Metta-sutta* of the SNip (152) to "never return to lie again in a womb" (*na hi jātuggabbhaseyya punar etīti*).

[16] I admit that I have trouble in fully comprehending the simile of fire in the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*. Specifically, it is unclear why it is that after his death the Buddha cannot be said to not-exist if he really is similar to a fire whose burning material has been exhausted. What is clear is that because the Buddha creates no new karma through grasping (*upādāna*) at the aggregates, they will die out. The sutta's statement seems to comprise an attempt to say that there is some continuity after death but that this continuity is not a regular rebirth and should not be thought of in terms of *sassata* or *uccheda* (eternalism or extinction, for a presentation of these terms see section 2.3.2). For further insights into possible meanings of the Buddha's statement, which consider the earlier Vedic and Upaniṣadic "fire-doctrine," see Frauwallner (1973: 41–55) – the extinguishing of fire, as the most subtle of the "life-carrying elements," could be thought to leave one in the innermost "All-supreme World-Soul" (p. 55).

[17] The same statement is repeated regarding each of the five aggregates. For the first aggregate *rūpa* the text reads "*Evam eva kho, Vaccha, yena rūpena tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya taṃ rūpaṃ tathāgatassa pahīnaṃ ucchinnamūlaṃ tālāvatthukataṃ anabhāvaṃkataṃ āyatiṃ anuppādadhammaṃ.*"

(*paññāpeyya*), including after he dies. In this sense, he is beyond existence and non-existence and sees himself as "deep, unfathomable and difficult to penetrate – like the ocean."[18]

That these last four questions form the heart of the theme of the unanswered questions is evident also from the collection of discourses in "the collection on the unanswered (questions)" (*Abyākata-saṃyutta*) of the SN, which assembles a number of discussions of this topic. In seven of the eleven discourses that comprise this *saṃyutta*, it is only the last four questions about the existence of the Tathāgata after death that are submitted to the Buddha and remain "unanswered."[19] All seven texts make no mention of any of the other questions in the set of ten questions while an eighth text, an adapted version of the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, also discusses only the question of the state liberated people attain after death.[20] It is only in two of the eleven discourses, both parallel versions of the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, that the questions about the nature of the world are even mentioned.[21] Thus, it is clear that the elusive and counter-intuitive questions about the nature of the Tathāgata after death were considered by the compilers of the *Abyākata-saṃyutta* to express the core of the "unanswered questions" theme. The same is true regarding the *Abyākata-sutta* of the AN (7.54), which also deals only with these last four questions. It therefore seems that the *Cūḷamāluṅkya-sutta*, which introduced the simile of the poisoned arrow discussed above, is actually the only discourse that revolves around the theme of the unanswered questions that could lend itself to the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings as shunning philosophy and metaphysics. The main point made by the vast majority of textual variations on this same theme is that the Tathāgata's state after death cannot be put into words.[22] This is what remains unexplained.

In fact, a close reading of the first six questions of the list shows that they, too, are concerned with an inquiry about the afterlife. The first four questions ask whether the world is eternal or not-eternal and whether the world has an end or has no end. Since these questions appear to reflect on the nature of the world, they have almost unanimously been regarded as metaphysical questions about the nature of reality. But the early Buddhist notion of the world does not convey metaphysical meanings of this sort.

[18] *Tathāgato gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāḷho – seyyathāpi mahāsamuddo.*
[19] These are suttas numbers 1–6 and 11 in the *Saṃyutta*.
[20] This is the 9th sutta of the *saṃyutta*, the *Kutūhalasālā-sutta*.
[21] These are the 7th and 8th suttas of the *saṃyutta*, the *Moggallāna-sutta*, and the *Vacchagotta-sutta*.
[22] For a similar allusion to the state of the Tathāgata after his death, which cannot be grasped even by the gods, see the end of the BJS (DN I.46).

Rather, the world of these texts is the world of human experience, as we see in the *Samiddhilokapañha-sutta* ("The discourse on Samiddhi's question about the world"):

(SAMIDDHI:) Sir, it is said "world, world"; in what sense may there be a world or a conceptual knowledge (*paññatti*) of the world?

(THE BUDDHA:) Where, Samiddhi, there is the eye, there are forms, there is eye consciousness, there are things to be cognized by eye consciousness, that is where there is a world or knowledge of the world. . . where there is the ear . . . the nose . . . the tongue . . . the body . . . the mind, where there are mental objects (*dhammā*), where there is mind consciousness, where there are things to be known by mind consciousness; that is where there is a world or knowledge of the world.

> And where, Samiddhi, there is no eye, there are no forms, there is no eye consciousness, there are no things to be cognized by eye consciousness, that is where there is no world or knowledge of the world . . . where there is no ear . . .no nose . . . no tongue . . .no body . . . no mind, where there are no mental objects (*dhammā*), where there is no mind consciousness, where there are no things to be known by mind consciousness; that is where there is no world or knowledge of the world.[23]

The world of the *Samiddhilokapañha-sutta* is heavily dependent on subjectivity; indeed, it appears to be the world of subjectivity itself. Where the structural elements of perception – the senses, their objects, consciousness and the cognized – exist, that is where there is a world. No less significant, according to this discourse there is no possibility of a world that is detached from these subjective elements since the sutta explicitly states that where the eye and so forth are not, there is no world. The world of this text appears to be fully estranged from our common objectified notions of the word.

Such statements regarding the subjective nature of the world are voiced in other discourses of the *Saḷāyatana-saṃyutta* as well. The *Paloka-sutta* ("The discourse on disintegration"), for example, says:

> That which is characterized by disintegration, Ānanda, is called world in the training of the noble ones. And what, Ānanda, is characterized by

[23] SN IV.39–41: *"'Loko, loko'ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, loko vā assa lokapaññatti vā"ti? Yattha kho, samiddhi, atthi cakkhu, atthi rūpā, atthi cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, atthi cakkhuviññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, atthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vāti . . . pe . . . atthi mano, atthi dhammā, atthi manoviññāṇaṃ, atthi manoviññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, atthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vā. Yattha ca kho, samiddhi, natthi cakkhu, natthi rūpā, natthi cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, natthi cakkhuviññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, natthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vā . . .pe. . . natthi mano, natthi dhammā, natthi manoviññāṇaṃ, natthi manoviññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā, natthi tattha loko vā lokapaññatti vā"ti."*

> disintegration? The eye, Ānanda, is characterized by disintegration. Forms are characterized by disintegration, eye consciousness . . . eye contact . . .that feeling that arises conditioned by eye contact, whether pleasurable, painful or neither painful nor pleasurable, is characterized by disintegration. The ear . . . the nose . . . the tongue . . . the body . . . the mind . . . mental objects . . . mind consciousness . . . mind contact . . . that feeling that arises conditioned by mind contact, whether pleasurable, painful or neither pain ful nor pleasurable, is characterized by disintegration. It is this that is characterized by disintegration, Ānanda, which is called "world" in the training of the noble ones.[24]

This quote merely adds to the previous one that the world also includes the sensations that arise with the perceptual elements referred to in the previous sutta as their base. We again find that the central way in which the world is referred to is as the world of subjective experience.[25]

This point is not new. A number of leading scholars have already shown that the term *loka* refers not so much to the external, objective world, but first and foremost to the world of human experience. Thus says Peter Harvey:

> The linguistic derivation of the word "*loka*" also indicates it as meaning "experienced world." Related words in Pāli are "*oloketi*," "he looks at," and "*āloka*," "light." Related Sanskrit words are *locate*, "he perceives," and *locana*, "eye." Thus the *primary* meaning of *loka* is "visible (or perceived) world." In general usage, *loka* is always linked to beings in some way, thus the Buddha says "I quarrel not with the world (*lokena*), the world quarrels with me" (SN III.138), and it is said "Indeed the world has fallen on trouble; one is born and grows old and dies." (DN II.30)"[26]

In an important study on the treatment of the five aggregates in the early suttas and Abhidhamma, Rupert Gethin advances a similar claim:

[24] SN IV.53: "*Loko, loko'ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, lokoti vuccatīti? Yaṃ kho, ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko. Kiñ ca, ānanda, palokadhammaṃ? Cakkhu kho, ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, rūpā palokadhammā, cakkhuviññāṇaṃ palokadhammaṃ, cakkhusamphasso palokadhammo, yampidaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā . . . pe . . . tampi palokadhammaṃ . . . pe . . . mano palokadhammo, dhammā palokadhammā, manoviññāṇaṃ palokadhammaṃ, manosamphasso palokadhammo, yampidaṃ manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi palokadhammaṃ. Yaṃ kho, ānanda, palokadhammaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye lokoti.*"

[25] See also the *Loka-sutta* (SN II.73–74), where the Buddha identifies between "the arising and passing away of the world" (*lokassa samudaya/atthaṅgama*) and the process of the arising and cessation of links 5–12 of the twelve links of dependent-origination, which relate to the psychological process that leads to rebirth. "The world" is once again equal to aspects of human life. Another relevant discourse is the *Sabba-sutta* ("The discourse on everything", SN IV.15), where the Buddha equates between "everything" (*sabbaṃ*) and the six senses and their objects.

[26] Harvey (1995: 79). For a similar position, see Hamilton (1996: xxvi–xxviii).

> What begins to emerge, then, is a series of correspondences: *dukkha*, the five *upādānakkhandas*, *sakkāya* (i.e. the living body), *bhāra* (i.e. the burden), *loka* (i.e. the world), the six internal *āyatanas* (i.e. the internal sense bases), *satta* (i.e. a being). All these expressions apparently represent different ways of characterising the given data of experience or conditioned existence, and are also seen as drawing attention to the structure and the sustaining forces behind it all. In this way the *khandhas* begin to take on something of a wider significance than is perhaps appreciated when they are seen merely as a breaking down of the human individual into constituent parts.[27]

The world and the aggregates are both terms that are used to denote human experience, or as Gethin puts it, "conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject."[28] When he summarizes his analysis, Gethin identifies between the five aggregates and the world:

> For any given individual there are, then, only these five *upādānakkhandhas* they define the limits of his world, they are his world. This subjective orientation of the *khandhas* seems to arise out of the simple fact that, for the *Nikāyas*, this is how the world is experienced; that is to say, it is not seen as having primarily metaphysical significance.[29]

Although I am unaware of any explicit definition of the world as the five aggregates in the early suttas, Gethin's position regarding the connection between the aggregates and the world is resonated in Mahāyāna treatises. Mark, for instance, the following passage from the twelfth chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhsrikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* ("The perfection of wisdom in 8000 lines"), in which the Buddha defines the term "world": "The five aggregates, Subhūti, have been declared as 'the world' by the Tathāgata. Which five? Form, sensations, perceptions, formations and consciousness. These five aggregates, Subhūti, have been declared as 'the world' by the Tathāgata."[30] While the explicit identification between the five aggregates and "the world" may not have been formulated in the

27 Gethin (1986: 42).

28 Ibid., 49: "However, the five *khandhas*, as treated in the *Nikāyas* and early *Abhidhamma*, do not exactly take on the character of a formal theory of the nature of man. The concern is not so much the presentation of an analysis of man as object, but rather the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject. Thus at the most general level *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṃkhāras* and *viññāṇa* are presented as five aspects of an individual being's experience of the world; each *khandha* is seen as representing a complex class of phenomena that is continuously arising and falling away in response to processes of consciousness based on the six spheres of sense."

29 Ibid., 50.

30 The Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* is taken from the site of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon, http://dsbc.uwest.edu/node/4368.

Nikāyas, the materials quoted above demonstrate that this passage is not a misrepresentation of the early Buddhist approach to the subject.[31]

A final consideration regarding the nature of *loka* and its relationship to the aggregates comes from the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta* itself. The sutta introduces ten views that the Buddha rejects, including four that speak of the nature of "the world." The Buddha's reasoning regarding his rejection of these views is based on his perception of the aggregates. Thus, it is clear that the theories expressed by the ten views relate to the nature of the aggregates; indeed, the world *is* the aggregates. Since the impermanence of the aggregates teaches the Buddha about the nature of the world, we realize again that the world of the unanswered questions is primarily the world of human subjectivity. In an interesting variation on this reading of the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, the *Dutiya-isidatta-sutta* of the SN says that the ten "metaphysical" views are based on the view of "identity" (*sakkāya*); identity can be eradicated if one does not perceive a relationship between the self and the aggregates.[32] Other discourses also claim that views rely on the perception of a self.[33]

When we realize that the early conception of "the world" relates not to objective, external reality but to existence as perceived subjectively or to the aggregates, we may reconsider the meaning of the first four so-called "metaphysical" questions. It now appears that these questions, like the last four of the list of the ten unanswered ones, relate to the question of life after death, indeed a heavily metaphysical problem. The question is, in fact, what happens to the aggregates upon death. The two views regarding the world being eternal or without an end refer to a belief that there is some continuity of life after death; the parallel views of the world being non-eternal and with an end reflect the notion that there is no afterlife.

[31] The close relationship between the world and the aggregates is highlighted in the *aṭṭhakathā* to the BJS, where the commentary explains the view of eternalism:

"Eternalism regarding self and the world": some grasp at "the self" and "the world" among forms etc., and recogonize them as eternal, deathless, permanent and substantial. As it is said, they recogonise form as the self and the world, and they furthermore recogonise the self and the world as eternal. In the same manner they recogonise feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness as the self and the world, and furthermore recogonise the self and the world as eternal."

Sassataṃ attānañ ca lokañ cāti rūpādīsu aññataraṃ attāti ca lokoti ca gahetvā taṃ sassataṃ amaraṃ niccaṃ dhuvaṃ paññapenti. Yathāha – "rūpaṃ attā ceva loko ca sassato cāti attānañ ca lokañ ca paññapenti tathā vedanaṃ, saññaṃ, saṅkhāre, viññāṇaṃ attā ceva loko ca sassato cāti attānañ ca lokañ ca paññapentī"ti

[32] SN IV.286–88. Note that this text speaks not only of the ten views, but also of "the 62 views preached in the *Brahmajāla(sutta)*" (*Yāni cimāni dvāsaṭṭhi diṭṭhigatāni brahmajāle bhaṇitāni*).

[33] The two discourses from the *Abyākata-saṃyutta* mentioned above that mention the full list of the ten unanswered questions, the *Moggallāna-sutta* (SN IV. 391–95) and the *Vacchagotta-sutta* (SN IV.395–97), both explain that the ten views are mistaken since they rely on the existence of a personal self.

The Buddha denies both of these options, presumably since they are all extreme views that employ the end positions of eternalism and extinction: the first, *sassata*, believes that the same person continues to the next life and experiences his own karma; the second, *uccheda*, ignores the rules of karma and severs the connection between this life and the next.[34]

The first four of the unanswered questions regarding the nature of the world are in fact metaphysical but only in the sense that they discuss the afterlife. The Buddha denies these positions, but his denial is of no less a metaphysical nature than the views he refutes. The Buddha knows what will happen to him after he dies; the only problem with the first four views is that they fail to express what he believes he firmly knows – his own state of being in the afterlife. He does not deny metaphysics per se but the specific approaches these views are based on.[35]

When the first four "unanswered questions" relate to notions of personal continuity after death and the last four to the continuity of a liberated being after death, it seems most reasonable to interpret the two remaining questions, numbers five and six, in the same vein. Indeed, these two questions – whether the *jīva* and the body are the same or distinct – can easily be seen to ask whether there is a subjective element that persists after death. The body dies, and the question is if there is anything else, any living element – a *jīva* – that does.[36]

A short look at the nature of "views" and of "the world" in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (BJS),[37] generally considered as the *locus classicus* for the early Buddhist understanding of mistaken views, will shed important light on our discussion. In this text, the Buddha relates sixty-two mistaken views advocated by rival schools, some of which relate to the nature of "the self

[34] For further discussion of the two extremes of *sassata* and *uccheda*, see section 2.3.2. This reading of the unanswered questions as speaking of the extreme views of eternalism and extinction, with specific regard to questions of continuity after death, is very much in line with the *atthakathā* commentary on the unanswered questions in the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*:

Here, "I do not" in the first instance, says "I do not hold the view of eternalism," in the second "I do not hold the view of annihilation." In this way the contradiction regarding all instances of the holding of (the views of) having or not having an end, etc., should be known. "Is and is not," this here is the theory of partial eternalism. "Is not and is not not," this should be known as "(the theory) of slippery confusion" (*Tattha na kho ahanti paṭhamavāre nāhaṃ sassatadiṭṭhikoti vadati, dutiye nāhaṃ ucchedadiṭṭhikoti. Evaṃ antānantikādivasena sabbavāresu paṭikkhepo veditabbo. Hoti ca na ca hotīti ayaṃ panettha ekaccasassatavādo. Neva hoti na na hotīti ayaṃ amarāvikkhepoti veditabbo*).

[35] See also Robinson (1972: 319): "It is not a question of metaphysics versus pragmatic wisdom, but rather one of which metaphysics is the most efficacious in attaining an existential objective."

[36] See also Robinson (1972: 314).

[37] DN 1. For a presentation of the BJS and an examination of its relation to its Chinese counterpart in the *Saṃyukta-āgama*, see Anālayo (2009a). For further analysis and a discussion of the text's importance, see Bodhi (1978).

and the world." Thus, at first sight, these views seem to express ontological positions that see the world, for example, as eternal. But upon closer inspection, we find that almost all of the sixty-two views caricatured by this text relate to the nature of the self, with specific emphasis on questions regarding the nature of personal continuity and of the afterlife. For example, the first four views ("eternalism," *sassata*) understand the present person to be the same as the one in previous lives; views 4–8 ("partial eternalism," *ekaccasassata*) provide variations on the previous four positions; views 19–50 ("doctrines of having perception, of having no perception, of having both perception and no perception," *saññīvāda, asaññīvāda, nevasaññīnāsaññīvāda*) all speak of the nature of the being that will be reborn after this life; views 51–57 ("views of annihilation," *ucchedavāda*) believe that some element of human consciousness is annihilated at death. The only exceptions to the focus on personal continuity in the afterlife are two of the views in the section on the world having an end or not (*antānantavāda*), which employ spatial metaphors in order to express that "the world has an end."[38] This interpretation of the statement "the end of the world" differs from ours yet it too should probably be understood as part of the inquiry into the question of the afterlife, taking a stance on whether there is anything that is beyond the known world. In any case, this statement is heavily outweighed by the other views criticized by the BJS, which all concern the relationship between the human being and the reality he will attain after death or that characterized him before this life; this includes the discussion of the possible eternal nature of "the self and the world" in views 1–4, which correspond to the first two of the ten unanswered questions. Thus, the BJS supports the understandings that (a) views refer mainly to the nature of the self and to understandings regarding the afterlife, and that (b) "the world" refers primarily to subjective existence and experience.

Let us recapitulate and ask where this analysis of the "unanswered" questions leaves us. First, the arguments that the Buddha rejected philosophy and metaphysics, that he refrained from teaching metaphysics, or that his concerns were only pragmatic are misleading; the Buddha of the

[38] These are views 9 and 11 of the world having an end and having both an end and no-end. The only other exception to the direct concern with the question of personal continuity are views 13–15 (*amarāvikkhepikā*, "eel-wriggling" or "endless equivocation," see Walsche [1995: 541, n.58]), in which teachers stubbornly avoid taking any position regarding what is good or bad (*kusala*, *akusala*). These views could be read, however, as inquiring into the causal power of good and bad action in determining the reality after death. Indeed, in view 16, the last view in this group, the "eel-wriggler" avoids taking a stance on questions regarding the afterlife.

unanswered questions did entertain a strong interest in metaphysics, only that these relate only to the nature of selfhood. In refusing to answer the ten questions or to accept the ten views, the Buddha is indicating only that they fail to capture the subtlety of his understanding regarding the state he will be in after he passes away. The Buddha may not have put philosophical speculation at the foreground of his teaching, but at the very least his doctrines were couched in a metaphysics that relied on the acceptance of an afterlife; he was also certain he knew how the realities of the afterlife are brought into being. Most importantly, he felt he knew what his personal reality (or unreality) would be like.

The idea of liberation cannot be considered non-philosophical. Still, as the Buddha teaches Māluṅkya through the simile of the poisoned arrow, theoretical speculation is not the focal point of the teaching; theory should not replace personal realization. Realization may have deep metaphysical significance– a secure, thoroughly painless reality in the afterlife – but it must be actualized through practice. In the remaining parts of this chapter we will examine two core philosophical positions – selflessness and dependent-origination – that are meant to guide practice and to facilitate a realization with deep psychological impact. A true, concrete perception of these truths possesses distinct liberating power. We begin with a discussion of the early doctrine of selflessness.

2.2 Selflessness

The Buddhist doctrine of selflessness (*anatta*) has received ample scholarly attention, and I have no intention of reopening the intricate questions regarding the precise purport of this doctrine, mainly the one regarding whether the Buddha ultimately accepted or denied the existence of a S/self[39] (*atta*, Skt. *ātman*).[40] Rather, in line with the general thread of

[39] The Buddhist doctrine of selflessness is structured in relation to the Upaniṣadic notion of the Self (*ātman*, capital 'S'). Here I retain the capital "S" in "Self" only in places where the relationship to the Upaniṣadic theory is central. In most cases I refer to a more ordinary sense of self or selfhood with a lower case "s."

[40] A good summary of this discussion is Harvey (1995: ch. 1) as well as Gethin (1998: 159–162). Oetke (1988) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the question of whether the Buddha advocated a self or not and concludes that the question cannot be decided. Personally, I believe that the fact that the Buddha defined "eternalism" (*sassata*) as an extreme and mistaken view, while at the same time the self cannot be thought to reside outside of the aggregates (Gethin [1998: 161]) defies the possibility that the Buddhism we encounter through the Nikāyas believed in the truth of a self. One would also incline to think that if the Buddha did believe in the reality of the self, he would have stated so unambiguously. For a different view on this matter, see Pérez-remón (1980).

my discussion, my focus will be on one main point – that the early Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* is essentially an approach to human experience, which is to be implemented in the mind in real time as part of the path to liberation. The theoretical aspect of this doctrine is secondary and derives from the primary practical significance. This is not a general and universal denial of essence, and the teaching has little concern with the nature of external objects.[41] In accord with the main focus on subjectivity, the doctrine concentrates on the concrete realization of selflessness in the sense that all things are not one's-self, that they are "not-I" or "not-my-self." The philosophical principle of selflessness is an abstracted expression of a particular observation regarding the nature of human existence and the character of human experience. The main import of the teaching is practical, and so is its goal – its realization is meant to facilitate a transformative and therapeutic detachment.

That being said, it is also important to pick up the metaphysical scent of the doctrine of selflessness, which lingers in the background and is perceived mainly when we read between the lines. The perception of selflessness results from more than pure, non-committed logic but relies on an intuition that once reality is not-permanent, once it is not the expression of an eternal self, it cannot express true nature and is not worth our interest. The discovery that all things, mainly the five aggregates, are not one's self, is meant to produce intense detachment, which will presumably lead to liberation. This is a statement beyond what most people would be willing to stomach and demands some version of the preconceived assumption that *saṃsāra* is pain in order to make sense. This idea, which is crucial for the claim that one should opt out of the system and strive toward liberation, is itself heavily laden with metaphysics. All this, is quite far from a simple, commonsensical observation of empirical reality and participates in a unique, fascinating metaphysical system.

Another central question is whether the Buddha, by denying the *ātman*, intended a refutation of the personal I, together with the denial of a more metaphysical notion of the Self along the lines of the Upaniṣadic *ātman*. Harvey (1995: esp. ch.1–3) believes that only a metaphysical Self is refuted, and Vetter (1988: ch. 9) also sees the refutation of a personal self as a later development. Collins (1982: 119) understands the doctrine as refuting the more regular notions of the sense of self as well. This view fits well with the basic denial of the sense of "mine" (*mama*), which often accompanies the metaphysical argument.

41 The claim is made, albeit not very commonly in the suttas, that things, mainly the aggregates, lack essence in the sense that they are impermanent (see, for example, the *Pheṇapiṇḍūpama-sutta* at SN III.140, discussed in note 61). The insubstantiality of "things" never carries the consequence of being thought of as illusions in the sense spoken of in Mahāyāna treatises. See Shulman (2008a).

The metaphysical assumptions marked, we turn to the main focus of the doctrine, which is an analysis of human subjectivity. As we enter our discussion, we should notice that the Nikāyas express almost no interest in the nature of "all things." The statement in which the Buddha characterizes "all things" as impermanent, painful, and selfless,[42] for example, appears in remarkably few places in the central four Nikāyas. At times, when the Buddha does say that "all things are not-the-self" (*sabbe dhammā anattā*), he does so immediately after listing the five aggregates,[43] defined above, following Gethin, as "conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject." In fact, there are very few cases in which the Buddha refers to "all things" in any way at all.[44] When he makes a general statement such as *sabbe dhammā anattā*, the Buddha only describes *dhammas* as selfless, intending probably to describe first and foremost the nature of mental events and subjective realities.[45] He is not thinking about things in an abstract sense but about experiential reality.

My discussion of selflessness in the following pages will rely on Steven Collins's (1982: ch. 3) classification of the basic arguments formulated in the early Buddhist texts in favor of the position of selflessness. Collins outlines four main arguments: (1) the argument from lack of control, (2) the argument of the "three characteristics,"[46] (3) the argument that the self has no intelligible relationship to the aggregates,[47] and (4) the argument of dependent-origination. Since this last argument will be treated separately in the next section, I will confine myself here to a short analysis of the first three items.

The main point I wish to establish regarding the arguments in favor of *anatta* is that they only make sense if they are understood to be part of

[42] This is paradigmatically expressed in *Dhammapada* 279.

[43] SN III.132; MN I.228. The Buddha says *sabbe dhammā anattā* in an unspecified sense at SN IV.401 and at AN 3.137 (I.286). See also AN 6.100 (III. 442) and AN 7.18 (IV.14)

[44] Another type of statement in which the Buddha relates to *sabbe dhammā* ("all things") is when he says "nothing is worth adhering to" (*sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivāyati*) at SN IV.50, MN I.251, and AN 7.61 (IV.86). For another instance where the Buddha speaks of the causes of the arising of "all things" is in the *Mūlaka-sutta*, which appears twice at AN 8.83 (IV. 338) and AN 10.58 (V.106). See also MN I.1.

[45] For discussions of the term *dhamma*, see Ronkin (2005: ch. 2) and Gethin (2004, 2005).

[46] The later term of "the three characteristics" (*ṭilakkhaṇā*) is absent from the early suttas but is convenient in order to refer to the characterization of things as impermanent, suffering, and not-the-self.

[47] Here I expand Collins's definition of this argument, "it is pointless to speak of a self apart from experience." The argument is not only that there is no self apart from experience but also that no part of experience is the self.

an inquiry into the nature of subjective reality. Not only are the claims remarkably weak otherwise, but the texts clearly state that this is their main interest. The arguments against the reality of the self are intended to analyze whether the person conducting the analysis is correct in seeing different elements of his reality, primarily the five aggregates, as his self. Once the claim that they are not the self is established, the main significance of the analysis manifests: the goal of the inquiry is to cause a perceptual transformation in the experiencing subject, who will quit seeing all elements of his reality – his personal reality – as his self. This perceptual transformation will then lead to an emotional reorganization that generates dispassion toward and detachment from the "not-my-self" objects of perception.

The central way in which the Buddha teaches the doctrine of selflessness in the Nikāyās is through identifying objects of reflection, primarily the five aggregates, as impermanent, painful, and not-the-self.[48] These items were eventually termed "the three characteristics" (*tilakkhaṇā*), a definition which does not appear in the Nikāyas. This argument often comes together with another one regarding the lack of control over the aggregates. The *locus classicus* for both these arguments is the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta* – "The discourse on the characteristics of not-being-the-self"[49] – reported to be the second discourse preached by the Buddha and later duplicated or reworked in many additional discourses. Here the Buddha, as he addresses his first group of five disciples, begins with the less frequently applied argument regarding the lack of control:

> The body ("form", *rūpa*), monks, is not the self. If this very body, monks, were the self, this body would not be plagued by affliction,[50] and one could

[48] Collins (1982: 98): "Statistically, a very high portion of the discussion of not-self in the suttas consists in various versions of this argument."

[49] SN III. 66–68.

[50] The primary meaning given by PED for *saṃvattati* is "to lead to," which fits well with the *ābādhāya* as the dative of *ābādha*, as translated by Bodhi (2000: 901): "this form would not lead to affliction." This translation is slightly misleading and is less philosophically coherent, however, since the point should be that if the body (in this case the translation of *rūpa* as "the body" is preferable) is the self, no affliction should be experienced in it or in relation to it, rather than the form being the cause of pain. A preferable reading would take *ābādhāya* as an instrumental of the feminine *ābādhā* (attested in Sanskrit), which would then also free *saṃvattati* from the inappropriate causative implication of "to lead to." *Saṃvattati* can then be taken as closer to *vattati* (Skt. *vṛt*) "to happen, to take place, to be." Then, noticing the reflexive optative *saṃvatteyya*, it becomes clearer that the occurrence of *ābādhā* is in the body itself. Thus we may translate "this body would allow not for affliction to take place (in it)" or "would not be characterized by affliction," or, yet more literally "would not be occurred by affliction." In order to preserve the instrumental *ābadhāya*, I translate "this body would not be plagued by affliction."

> obtain in relation to it "may my body be this way, may my body not be this way." Because, monks, the body is not the self, the body is plagued by affliction, and one cannot achieve in relation to it "may my body be this way, may my body not be this way."[51]

The Buddha then proceeds to make the same claim regarding the other four aggregates. We see, first, that this argument is made regarding the aggregates, which we have defined as the constituents of subjective reality. Therefore, the type of self that is refuted refers to an element of subjective reality. Next, the argument is that the aggregates are selfless in the sense that they are "not-I," "not-myself," and "not what I really am." It is not said that the aggregates lack a self of their own, that is that they lack essence, but that they cannot be seen as the self of the subject conducting the analysis. This conclusion is inevitable under a simple examination of the argument, which says that a person cannot command the aggregates to behave or exist in a certain way. It must be clear as daylight that no claim is being made with regard to the nature of external objects, but only regarding the character of subjective elements of the body, feelings, etc. The self who cannot control the aggregates and who is denied by the text is the self as the essence of subjectivity.

It should also be noted that the argument regarding the lack of control over the aggregates makes best sense as a denial of Upaniṣadic notions of the *ātman*.[52] If the self that is denied is not the *ātman*, why must he have absolute control over the aggregates? Although a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the early Buddhist doctrines and Upaniṣadic metaphysics would surely be beneficial to understanding this claim, here we may remain content only to mark the most salient Upaniṣadic ideas in this passage. First, the basic intuition that the *ātman* is related to the deathless (*amṛta*), the blissful nectar of the gods, seems to be at the base of the idea that if form were the Self it should be characterized by permanent bliss and "would not be plagued by affliction." Second, the heart of the Upaniṣadic metaphysics is that reality is comprised of structural relationships – *bandhus* or *upaniṣads* – and thus that reality is an embodiment of these metaphysical correspondences.[53] Therefore, if the Self is bliss, its manifestation in the

[51] SN III.66: *Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā. Rūpañ ca hidaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhetha ca rūpe – 'evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahosī'ti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe – 'evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahosī'ti.*

[52] Collins (1982: 97); Vetter (1988: 39–40); and Gombrich (1996: 14–17).

[53] It is still too common of a view among scholars of Buddhism that the Upaniṣads teach mainly that "the *ātman* is the *Brahman*" (for example, Gombrich [1996]: 31–32). While statements to this effect

aggregates must ultimately be bliss as well. Finally and most importantly, the notion of control, supposedly possessed by the *ātman* or the adept who knows the *ātman*, appears to be at work in the idea that if the aggregates were the self, one could effect full control over them.[54] The consideration of the Upaniṣadic background thus leads to an improved appreciation of the Buddhist argument, and it strengthens the claim that the discussion regarding the lack of selfhood involves questions of personal identity.

These same considerations regarding the subjective nature of the early Buddhist theory of selflessness apply to the argument that what is impermanent must be seen as painful and as not-the-self. In the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta*, this argument follows immediately after the previous one regarding the lack of control:

> "What do you think, monks, is form permanent or impermanent?"
> "Impermanent, sir."
> "And that which is impermanent is it pleasurable or painful?"
> "Painful, sir."
> "And that which is impermanent, painful and characterized by transformation, is it right to see it as 'this is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"
> "Surely not, sir."[55]

The Buddha then subjects the remaining four aggregates to the same analysis. As has been noted by a number of scholars, this argument is most appealing when it is seen to refer to the Upaniṣadic notion of a permanent and blissful Self – there is no inherent reason why what is impermanent must be suffering or why what is impermanent and suffering must not be my-self.[56] A Buddhist monk suffering from a headache, like anyone else, will see the passing of his headache as pleasure, and in no way should his headache's impermanence suggest to him that he has no self. It is only when impermanence equals pain and non-selfhood by an *a priori* definition that this argument is strong. At times, a similar but more forceful argument is presented, when the Buddha argues directly for the lack of a

may be found in rare places in the early Upaniṣads (such as BU 3.4–5), the Upaniṣads revolve mainly around the theory of relations (*bandhus*) and its functioning in sacrifice (see, for example, BU 1.1). See further in Smith (1989: esp. ch. 2) and Olivelle (1996: Introduction).

[54] See for instance in BU 1.4.10; control of reality is said again and again in the Upaniṣads to be afforded to "one who knows this" (*ya evaṃ veda*). For the absolute power of knowledge for the pre-Buddhist Brahmanic tradition, see also Bronkhorst (2009: 29–30).

[55] SN III.67: *"Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā"ti? "Aniccaṃ, bhante." "Yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā"ti?" Dukkhaṃ, bhante." "Yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ – 'etaṃ mama, esoham asmi, eso me attā'"ti? "No hetaṃ, bhante."*

[56] See note 53, p. 80.

self from the initial observation of impermanence. That a permanent self cannot underlie an impermanent reality should indeed be seen as the principal Buddhist conceptual argument against the reality of selfhood.

We see once again that this central argument about "the three characteristics" is made in relation to the five aggregates and hence that it teaches a human subject that he lacks a self or that his aggregates are not his self. The specific wording of the discourse makes this point yet clearer: one is not to see "this is mine, this I am, this is my self" (*etaṃ mama, esoham asmi, eso me attā*). Selflessness is obviously a personal realization that makes a claim about human subjectivity. Notice also that it is of no significance for our analysis whether the Buddha affirmed or denied the *atmān*; for us it is only important that in making his claim for selflessness the Buddha was speaking about the structure of subjective reality.

The third argument for *anatta*, best defined as "there is no coherent relation between the self and the aggregates," is on par with the other two arguments just outlined. Collins alludes to a statement in the DN's *Mahānidāna-sutta*, which denies three ways of understanding the relationship between the self and feelings – as one and the same, as different, or as the self possessing the attribute of feelings. Collins explains that if the self and feelings were equal, then the self must be transient and conditioned; if they are different – "where there is no feeling at all, is it possible that one may say 'I am?'"[57] Finally, if the self possesses feelings as attributes, a transient self is once again implied. Other texts may represent this style of argument somewhat differently, mainly through the claim that the self cannot be equal to or different from the aggregates.[58] For our concerns, what is of central importance is again that here too it is evident that the argument is targeted against the existence of a personal, subjective self.

It is worth noting that the subjective emphasis of the teaching of selflessness is evident also in the early notion of "emptiness" (*suññata*), which means only that the aggregates are devoid of all relation to the self.[59] The same is true in relation to the well-known poem that says

[57] Collins (1982: 99).

[58] More precisely, the argument is made that the self is not (1) equal to the aggregates, (2) their possessor, and that the self is not (3) in the aggregates, or (4) vice versa. The last three elements reflect a position that the self is distinct from the aggregates; in Mahāyāna contexts this is made explicit by listing this possibility separately as the second item in a list of five (for example, in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 18.1 or 22.1). For an employment of this argument in the early discourses, see for example, the MN's *Bhaddekaratta-sutta* (MN 131, III.188–89).

[59] Emptiness refers in the Pāli suttas to the fact that different aspects of experience are "empty of self and what belongs to the self"; see SN IV.54: "Because, Ānanda, it is empty of self and what belongs to the self, the world is said to be empty" (*Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā*

that "form is like a ball of foam, sensations are like a bubble, perceptions like a mirage, formations like a banana-tree, consciousness like an illusion."[60] Here too there is no doctrine of ubiquitous essencelessness, certainly not in the sense that all is illusion, but rather there is a statement regarding the impermanent, fleeting nature of the aggregates. There are indeed no true reasons to assume that the Buddha taught selflessness as a universal denial of essence.

We have seen that in the Nikāyas selflessness means "not-my-self" or "not-I" and that its main claim regards the nature of subjectivity. The object of analysis is the aggregates, and the discovery that they are not-the-self says something mainly about the nature of individual existence. Returning to the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta*, we can observe a second fundamental point: the doctrine of selflessness is not merely a philosophical or psychological principle but rather functions as part of the Buddhist transformative enterprise; the vision of selflessness has a practical, concrete end of facilitating liberation. Following the articulation of the argument regarding the three characteristics in the sutta, the Buddha says:

> Therefore, monks, whichever form of the past present or future, inner or outer, coarse or subtle, lowly or exalted, far or near should be observed through correct wisdom as it truly is: 'this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[61]

Again, we see vividly that the realization of selflessness is personal and involves knowing that the five aggregates are not *one's-self* (the Buddha repeats this statement regarding each of the aggregates). More specifically,

tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati). For an almost identical statement see MN I.292. See also the quote from the *Mahāmāluṅkya-sutta* (MN I.432) in the previous chapter where emptiness is used in the sense of "not-the-self." For further discussion see Choong (1999 [1995]:12–16).

60 SN III.140: *pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ, vedanā bubbulūpamā, marīcikūpamā saññā, saṅkhārā kadalūpamā, māyūpamañ ca viññāṇaṃ*. This poem is part of the *Pheṇapiṇḍūpama-sutta*, which explains that the five aggregates, like the similes they are compared to, are "empty" (*rittaka*), "worthless" (*tucchaka*), and "devoid of essence" (*asāraka*). Modern scholars, as well as Buddhist scholiasts, used this statement in order to claim that Mahāyāna notions of emptiness are present in the early canon (see Lopez [1987: ch. 3] and Williams [1989: 47] who refer to works by Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, respectively). But these meanings appear alien to the text, especially when it is read together with the other suttas with which it is grouped in the SN's *Puppha-vaggo*. These discourses revolve around the notion of impermanence, and it is here also that the Buddha makes his well-known statement that he has no argument with the world regarding what wise people accept as existent and non-existent (SN IV.138). Bodhi (2000: 1085, n.185) also denies a reading of the *Pheṇapiṇḍūpama-sutta* that accords with Mahāyāna notions of emptiness. We should further note that this text speaks of the aggregates, and thus reflects on the nature of subjective reality.

61 SN III.68: *Tasmāt iha, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbaṃ rūpaṃ – 'netaṃ mama, nesoham asmi, na meso attā'ti evam etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.*

the point is about how things "should be observed" (*daṭṭhabbam*). Indeed, the text points to a perceptual change that is meant to occur, when one will begin to observe the contents of experience "through correct wisdom." This perceptual transformation is, however, only the first step, as it aims to direct the practitioner much farther along the path, all the way to liberation:

> Seeing in this way, monks, a learned disciple of the noble ones detaches from forms,[62] detaches from sensations, detaches from perceptions, detaches from formations, detaches from consciousness. Becoming detached, he grows dispassionate. Following dispassion, he is liberated. Being liberated there is the knowledge "liberated" and he knows "birth is destroyed, the spiritual life has been lived, what is to be done has been done, There will be no more of this state here."[63]

The perception of selflessness is not an end in itself. Rather, it is meant to lead to the cherished goal of liberation. We need not concern ourselves with the precise vision of liberation offered here, what for example the verbs *nibbindati* – "he detaches," or *virajjati* – "he becomes dispassionate" precisely intend; they obviously imply a very serious disengagement. More important is that such intense emotional, and possibly cognitive, disengagement is defined as the goal of philosophical analysis and is to be brought about by the fact that one observes reality in correct fashion. The ideal monk's perception of selflessness involves his knowing that the elements of his reality are not his self, a knowledge which stimulates a new emotional stance in relation to all elements of his experience. The monk has diminished his previous excitement and interest in all aspects of his being since he realizes that they are not himself. He then grows detached and dispassionate in a way that naturally effects his liberation.

An important question arises here, anticipated by our discussion of Bronkhorst's views of liberation discussed in the opening section of the previous chapter. Could it be that the transformation described takes place outside of meditation, in a mind that has not entered *samādhi*? Is this actually an intellectual conception of liberation? Likewise, is it possible that a vision such as the one described in this last passage occurs in a quieted *samādhi-ed* mind that has transcended conceptuality?

We are not yet in a position to offer full solutions to these questions, but some remarks are in order. First, it appears that this realization is not

[62] The text has the object of detachment in the locative case so a more literal translation would be "he (detaches) in relation to (the particular aggregate)."

[63] SN III.68: *Evaṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmimpi nibbindati, vedanāyapi nibbindati, saññāyapi nibbindati, saṅkhāresupi nibbindati, viññāṇasmimpi nibbindati. Nibbindaṃ virajjati; virāgā vimuccati. Vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti. 'Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā'ti pajānātī"ti.*

a truly intellectual one; the transformation involved does not focus on a theoretical understanding but on the emotional responses that result from a full internalization of the intellectual stance. The main impact of the realization thus does not appear to be theoretical. This process of the internalization of philosophy and its transformation into an immediate perceptual and emotional attitude will form the core of our discussion of the concept of mindfulness (*sati*) in the following chapter.

Second, although one can imagine that perceptions of the sort that have been related by the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta* could take place in the ordinary mind of any human being, it appears more reasonable that if they are to be liberating in any real sense, they must demand a more sustained form of reflection. Such intensified reflection is afforded by an awareness of the type that is said to occur in concentrated meditation. Liberation – if this term is to mean anything – demands a full harnessing of all psychological faculties; the whole of one's being must know, in the logic of the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta*, "this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." If we wish to take these statements seriously and to allow them to represent a different reality than the one we are familiar with, a reality that may reflect the world of dedicated Indian yogis practicing in the wilderness beyond the realms of society, we should appreciate that the event of liberation is more than an intellectual understanding and that it is naturally connected to meditative contemplation. Whether such a meditative mind must technically be said to be in *samādhi* or in a state that is beyond conceptuality is still open, but the connection to meditation seems evident.

There is one last consideration that supports the notion that the liberation described here is more than an intellectual understanding and probably involves concentrated meditation. The fact that the Buddha goes through each of the five aggregates or through the six senses in each of the passages we read suggests that the disciple who takes the instruction to heart carries them out in a focused state of contemplation. While the Buddha's teaching style here surely expresses pedagogical, mnemonic, or narrative concerns as well, this presentation cannot be reduced to these aspects of the text. If the main point was that the five aggregates are impermanent and selfless, for instance, it would surely be simpler to retain this simple statement in one's memory rather than to go through a long list of elements. This elaborate presentation fits well into the picture that realization occurs in its richest varieties when the visualization outlined by the texts is practiced in concentrated meditation.[64]

[64] The *Cūḷarahulovāda-sutta* (MN 147) offers a good example of the idea that the monotonous, repetitious statement that a long list of objects of inquiry are impermanent, painful, and not-the-self

We can even go one step further: these considerations recommend that the so-called intellectualist approach to liberation is related to meditative practice and probably is meant to take place as part of meditative observation. We have yet to explain, however, how what appears as a conceptual understanding can be experienced in *samādhi*. But must we? It seems that when philosophy has become a way of seeing, which has turned into an emotional stance, the transformation intended involves little, if any, conceptuality. When one observes the contents of his experience in the correct manner – not when he understands them conceptually – he is liberated.

2.3 Dependent-origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*)

Dependent-origination is widely acknowledged by students of all schools of Buddhism as one of the tradition's most fundamental principles.[65] The idea that things arise in dependence on their conditions is understood to be central to Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and soteriology. Nonetheless, as will become evident in the following pages, we still lack a clear definition of what dependent-origination actually means. Different understandings, representing distinct uses of the concept by numerous Buddhist teachers and schools, are grouped together so as to cloud our view of the development of the teaching.

The present analysis of dependent-origination intends to cut through the later layers of these developments so as to reveal the earlier, perhaps original uses of the concept. The prevalent understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is that all factors of existence depend on other factors in order to exist, nothing exists on its own, and no-thing possesses independent identity. This principle is said to apply to all mental as well as material phenomena and is summarized in the following abstract formulation:

refers to an active process of visualization. Here, the Buddha leads Rahula to realization in this way by analyzing each of the six senses, going through the categories of the sense, its object, its consciousness, the contact of the three, and any sensation, perception formation, or consciousness that arises dependent on the contact-event. The Buddha has Rahula state with regard to each and every one of these items that they are impermanent, painful, and not-the-self. Some may see this method of presentation as determined by the decrees of oral text composition and preservation, but it is nevertheless good to notice that it fits well with the interpretation that sees the instruction as deriving from meditative observation. The fact that so many aspects of experience are examined, and that Rahula himself is asked to reflect on them, suggests that the Buddha is leading his son through a personal reflection on his own mental processes, which probably involves some form of concentrated meditation.

[65] Large parts of this section have been adapted from Shulman (2008). I thank *Journal of Indian Philosophy* for granting me permission to use these materials.

When this is, that is. Following the arising of this, that arises.
When this is not, that is not. Following the cessation of this, that ceases.

Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati.
Imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.

Commonly, this formula is read as a characterization of all that exists. This view is adhered to by the vast majority of modern scholars writing on the subject as well as by traditional Buddhist teachers both ancient and modern. Specifically, it is accepted by authors who discuss early Buddhist doctrine. Many agree that Buddhism is not an ontological teaching, or was not so initially, and that its doctrinal emphasis is on the workings of the mind.[66] Nonetheless, it is generally believed that the Buddha described all things as *paṭiccasamuppanna* – dependently-originated. A good example is Steven Collins's *Selfless Persons*, referred to above in the discussion of selflessness: "In considering the teaching of dependent origination, which Buddhism used to oppose Brahmanism on the conceptual level, it is crucially important to distinguish between the general idea of conditionality, and the 12-fold series that has come to be the traditional way in which the teaching is expressed." Collins quotes the abstract formula and continues: "This general principle is *idappaccayatā*, 'the fact of things having a specific cause,' which is said always to be the case even when there is no Buddha to penetrate it in depth and teach the full sequence.[67] Collins's words offer an example of the understanding that all "things" exist dependently. Many other examples can be supplied in which leading modern scholars support such a claim.[68]

[66] The point that *paṭiccasamuppāda* deals mainly with the workings of the mind has been cogently made by Hamilton (1996: 67–69) and Ronkin (2005: 200). Nonetheless, both these scholars believe the discussion of the mind to be a particular case of a more general philosophical principle that relates to all things.

[67] Collins (1982: 106).

[68] Nyanatiloka (1971: 155); Varma (1971: 124); Rahula (1974 [1959]: 53); Kalupahana (1975: 55 – where he quotes Buddhaghosa who believes *paṭiccasamuppāda* characterizes "coordinate phenomena," and explains it as "that which has arisen dependent on causes," and 59 – where he accepts Buddhaghosa's view, and most clearly, 89); Wayman (1980: 276–79); Yamada (1980: 267, 275–76); Vetter (1988: 45); Nakamura (1989 [1980]: 69, although I am not perfectly clear about what he intends by "all phenomena which appear"); Harris (1991: 138); Nagao (1991: 174–176); Iida (1993 [1991]: 22); Bodhi & Ñāṇamoḷi (1995: 1233, n.408); Boisvert (1995: 8–9); Payutto (1995: 77ff.); Hamilton (1996: 68); Ronkin (2005: 200); and Kragh (2006: 271–72, especially note 441). Lamotte (1988: 35–40), although clearly emphasizing the mental aspect of the dependent origination – "The complex mechanism which indissolubly links desire to action and action to painful rebirth" (pp. 35–36) – also speaks of the teaching as characterizing "all the phenomena of existence" (pp. 36, 40). In the same context, he reads the *anatta* doctrine as a teaching regarding the insubstantiality of all things, and he suggests that dependent-origination supplements this insight by explaining how insubstantial

Another representative case is Sue Hamilton's *Early Buddhism: A New Approach*, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As part of her claim that early Buddhism is interested in how things work, Hamilton says:

> More generically, the focus on how things work is exemplified in the metaphysical doctrine that everything is dependently originated (the doc trine known as *paṭiccasamuppāda*). And whatever is dependently originated is also described as conditioned (*saṃkhata*). In the entirety of the experience that comprises one's cycle of lives nothing, of whatever nature, exists or occurs independently of conditioning factors. All such things, therefore, are conditioned things. In contrast to the more overtly soteriological one might say subject focused teachings, it is important to grasp the generic relevance of this: that it applies both subjectively *and* objectively. Not only is the state of any individual human being ... at any given moment dependent on conditioning factors, but so are chairs, trees, stars, the air we breathe, toenails, musical notes, ideas and thoughts (all of which I take to be objective in relation to the subject), and so on.[69]

Hamilton highlights the central "subject-focused" meaning of the early Buddhist teachings. But like so many other scholars, she accepts what has become the standard presentation of dependent-origination – the doctrine is just as much about chairs and stars as about the mind. In what follows I will show that this view is misguided with regard to the earlier developmental stages of this doctrine.

The quote from Collins exemplifies a more subtle, but no less common, error: The twelve links are seen as a particular case of the more general law regarding the dependent nature of all that exists; they are taken as an expression of the abstract formula quoted above, which applies to all phenomena. In contrast, the discussion here will demonstrate that the early Buddhist texts have no concern with a general theory of "existence in dependence" or of relativity but only with conditionality as (1) the most

phenomena appear and disappear (p. 36). He also understands *pratītyasamutpāda* as a middle way between existence and non-existence, basing himself on the *Kaccānagotta-sutta* (for a discussion of this last point see section 2.3.2). In Lamotte (1980: 125–26), although again emphasizing the psychological and soteriological aspects of "conditioned co-production," he is clear in stating that he views the "law of causes and effects" as "presiding over the formation and evolution of the triple world." Gethin (1998: 141–45) too emphasizes the subjective aspect of the teaching but seems to believe it to relate to all phenomena. The most significant place to see this is in his quote from Buddhaghosa on page 143, where he discusses the nature of "all conditioned things."

Stcherbatsky (2005 [1922]: 29) seems to have formulated the underlying principle of the position that regards *pratītya-samutpāda* as a formulation of the nature of all existents: "In the popular literature of the Sūtras the term *pratītya-samutpāda* is almost exclusively applied to the "wheel of life," although *the general meaning of this formula must have been present to the mind of all Buddhists*." (emphasis mine)

[69] Hamilton (2003: 22), emphasis in the original.

basic feature of mental life and (2) the main determining factor in the process of rebirth. Early Buddhism was concerned with identifying the processes of conditioning as they operate in the mind, an identification that was supposed to allow for a severance of all conditioning influence, which itself was thought to equal liberation. That is, early Buddhist thought took an interest in dependent-origination as an aspect of subjective existence and as part of the broader perspective that sought liberation. Viewing *paṭiccasamuppāda* as a description of the nature of reality in general means investing the words of the earlier teachings with meanings derived from later Buddhist discourse.

2.3.1 The twelve links and beyond

The teaching of dependent-origination appears in the Pāli Nikāyas most prominently in the context of the twelve links.[70] Although the twelve links are clearly not the oldest formulation of dependent-origination,[71] they will serve as the basis for our discussion since they have become the standardized form of the teaching. More importantly, the twelve links agree fundamentally with other expressions of dependent-origination in their basic message: they express the way that the mind functions in *saṃsāra*, the processes of mental conditioning that constitute human experience, as well as the way these mental processes condition the objective and material aspects of human reality. Dependent-origination expresses a fundamental insight into the conditioned processes that give rise to mental life; the twelve links are one expression of these processes.

[70] The links are not necessarily twelve in number. At times the list is longer (for example, MN I.54), shorter (for example, DN II.55), or rearranged (for example, the AV's *Kalahavivāda-sutta*). For different lists of conditioning found in the canon, see Bucknell (1999); Cox (1993: 124–25); and Schmithausen (2000). See the following note for further elaboration.

[71] The question regarding the relative antiquity of the twelve links has received much attention. The variegated expression of dependent-origination in the texts suggests that the twelve links can be understood as a relatively late standardization of the teaching, which attempts to give it coherent and unified form. See Collins (1982: 106); Ronkin (2005: 201). Bucknell (1999) offers a number of interesting suggestions regarding the process by which the formula was synthesized. A different analysis of this synthesis is offered by Schmithausen (2000). Following Frauwallner, and basing himself on the *Sarvāstivāda Mahānidāna-sūtra*, Schmithausen discusses three different sequences which serve as the basis for the later arrangement of the twelve links. He believes these three sequences to have been connected by the complier of the *Mahānidāna-sūtra* so as to form a series of nine *nidānas*, to which a tenth, *ṣaḍāyatana* (link number 5), was added for clarification. Later on the series was extended with the use of *saṃskāra* and *avidyā* to form the twelve-link formula. Another interesting and related work is Nakamura (1980), who discussed materials from the AV that appear to be an earlier layer of the teaching than the twelve links (see below). Wayman (1971: 185) is a dissident voice to this discussion, saying that he is "convinced that the full 12 members have been in Buddhism since earliest times."

The *Nidāna-saṃyutta* (NS), an important collection that deals primarily with the topic of conditioning, opens with the following text, which forms the standard exposition of the twelve links:

> And what, monks, is dependent origination? Dependent on (1) ignorance, monks, (2) (mental) formations[72] arise; dependent on (mental) formations, (3) consciousness; dependent on consciousness, (4) name and form; dependent on name and form, (5) the six bases (of the senses); dependent on the six bases, (6) contact; dependent on contact, (7) feelings; dependent on feelings, (8) thirst; dependent on thirst, (9) grasping; dependent on grasping, (10) becoming; dependent on becoming, (11) birth; dependent on birth, (12) old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery arise. This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, I say is dependent origination.[73]

This passage conveys the notion of dependent-*origination* and is complemented by a description of the parallel process of dependent-*cessation*, which expresses the liberating effect that the realization of conditionality can have.[74] Many issues arise regarding this well-known presentation of the twelve links. Discarding specific questions concerning the translation, most importantly those concerning the terms of the twelve links themselves, it will be valuable to begin with the way tradition prefers to understand the teaching. According to the classic reading, the twelve links depict the process of transmigration in *saṃsāra* over a period of three lifetimes. The first, a past existence, is expressed by the first two links. Depending on

[72] *Saṅkhāras* (Skt. *saṃskāra*) are most simply the imprints produced in the mind by human actions.

[73] SN II.1: *Katamo ca, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo? Avijjāpaccayā, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā; saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ; nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ; saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso; phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā; taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ; upādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo.*

[74] Dependent-cessation expresses the sequential stopping of each one of the twelve links:

Following the complete passionless cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of (mental) formations; following the cessation of (mental) formations, the cessation of consciousness; following the cessation of consciousness, the cessation of name-and-form; following the cessation of name-and-form, the cessation of the six bases (of the senses); following the cessation of the six bases, the cessation of contact; following the cessation of contact, the cessation of feelings; following the cessation of feelings, the cessation of thirst; following the cessation of thirst, the cessation of grasping; following the cessation of grasping, the cessation of becoming; following the cessation of becoming, the cessation of birth; following the cessation of birth, old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery cease. This is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

SN II.1–2: *Avijjāya tv eva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho; saṅkhāranirodhā viññāṇanirodho; viññāṇanirodhā nāmarūpanirodho; nāmarūpanirodhā saḷāyatananirodho; saḷāyatananirodhā phassanirodho; phassanirodhā vedanānirodho; vedanānirodhā taṇhānirodho; taṇhānirodhā upādānanirodho; upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho; bhavanirodhā jātinirodho; jātinirodhā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotīti.*

ignorance, one creates mental formations (*saṅkhārā*) through action, which lead to his or her present rebirth, beginning with consciousness, the third link. Consciousness continues to condition according to a set pattern in which "thirst" (*taṇhā*) and grasping (or better "dependence," *upādāna*[75]) are generated due to attraction and aversion toward pleasant and unpleasant sensations. Grasping will then propel the grasper toward his next rebirth – to "becoming" (*bhava*)[76] and to birth, and thus to aging and death, these being the last two members of the list of the twelve links that represent a future life. This, we are told, is how pain is generated.

Whether the twelve links refer to three different lives, as the traditional view holds,[77] or whether they relate only to one life[78] or even to a single instance of perception,[79] whether they were articulated in this same sequence by the Buddha or were later arranged in this way by his disciples, the different views of the twelve links explore the manner in which the mind conditions human experience and existence. The teaching is concerned mainly with an analysis of the workings of the mind, with identifying the different processes of mental conditioning, and describing their relationship. The twelve links do not deal with how things exist but with the lives of human beings and primarily with the processes by which the mind operates. These mental processes are manipulated by desire and grasping in order to produce future rebirth.[80]

75 *Upādāna*, translated most commonly as "attachment," refers mainly to the tendency to regard the five aggregates as one's self or as belonging to one's self. It is this approach that determines the inevitability of future rebirth.

76 The term *bhava* refers to a state of existence, a rebirth as a creature in different realms. See Burnouf (2010 [1844]: 455–56); Lamotte (1988: 38); Williams (1974: 59); and Schmithausen (2000: 52–53).

77 Nyantiloka (1971: 156, who relies on Buddhaghosa). Collins (1982: 203–5) refers to different classifications of the twelve links into three distinct lifetimes. Wayman (1980: 286–91) gives different renderings of the teaching according to periods of one, two, or three lifetimes. Tradition is forced to the view of different lifetimes by the rebirths implied by links three and eleven. Yamada (1980: 272) has shown this to be a result of the change from the "natural" to the "reversal" sequence of the links (see below). Schmithausen (2000: 45) remarks that the theory of three rebirths implied by the twelve links is actually an unintended consequence of the combination of three discrete, archaic conditioning sequences (see note 72). Modern authors often prefer to view these different "births" metaphorically.

78 Harvey (1995: 134–37, 159).

79 Nyanatiloka (1971) argues against such a view in his introduction to the twelve links. Yamada (1980: 271) believes the "natural sequence" of the links to work simultaneously rather than gradually. According to Cox (1993: 133–34), this view was popular in early Sarvāstivāda thought. Schmithausen (1997: 15) refers to the Theravādin Abhidhamma's development of this theory, which is discussed also by Anālayo (2008: 94). See also Anālayo (2003: 109–10).

80 Apparently the causing of rebirth, including the determining of the material reality of the human being, was more central to the earlier notions of conditionality than the twelve links themselves reveal. Schmithausen (2000) has shown that originally "name-and-form" referred to the psychophysical potential for the development of a human being which exists in the mother womb

The doctrine of the twelve links does have important ontological implications. It is based on a metaphysics that seems to believe that objects – real objects! – are conditioned by consciousness. Such an understanding is implied by the statement that form (*rūpa*) and the objects of the senses, the "external" side of links four and five, are conditioned by mental dispositions and consciousness (links two and three).[81] This same metaphysic is expressed once more in the enigmatic move from link nine to ten, where grasping conditions becoming and future rebirth. The point is that one is reborn in direct relation to acts of attachment conducted during his or her previous life/lives. Thus, the main formative influences on the conditioning process are subjective efforts and tendencies, such as mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), consciousness, thirst (or desire, *taṇhā*), and grasping (*upādāna*). The results of this process are not only mental but also include material or physical aspects of human life.

Although the ontological implications of the twelve links, as well as the metaphysical understanding behind them, are not the main point articulated by the teaching, they are still deeply significant for grasping the way early Buddhists viewed reality. These forms of conditioning, according to which the subjective creates the objective, undermine the realistic ontology often attributed to early Buddhism.[82] Some may wish to argue in response that the Buddha is speaking only about experience in complete disregard for the way objects "really" exist. But such an argument would demand too heavy a distinction between mental objects and the non-mental world they represent and would force a metaphorical interpretation of the meaning of rebirth. Such an argument also ignores the fact that these same metaphysics are at work in numerous other aspects of Buddhist thought – they are implied, most significantly, by the theory of karma,[83] which is of special

(or perhaps to the ovum?). Thus an important idea addressed by the early notion of conditionality concerns the physical construction of the embryo. For other cases where the Buddha demonstrates a keen interest in preventing the arising of name-and-form in this very physical manner, see the *Viññāṇa-sutta* (SN II. 91). See also Bodhi's [2000: 768] note on this sutta in regard to the notion of the descent of consciousness into the womb and the quote from the *Atthirāga-sutta* on p. 99.

81 Bucknell (1999: 320–26) conducts an elaborate discussion of the term *nāmarūpa*. He concludes that it refers to the objects of the six senses rather than the more common meaning of "mind-and-body." This would strengthen my claim regarding the ontological implications of the twelve links since the objects of the senses are then said to be conditioned by consciousness.

82 Examples of the perception of the Buddha as a naïve realist are Gombrich (1996: 4) and Hamilton (1996: xxviii–xxix).

83 Obviously the theory of karma itself is heavily metaphysical. It expresses its metaphysical commitment when it surmises that human life is a product of intention (which itself may have been produced in a previous life). Furthermore, karma is an adaptation of two earlier Indian

relevance to our discussion because of the traditional connection between karma and the twelve links.[84] Other concepts that reveal similar metaphysical positions are *manomaya* ("the mind made body"[85]) and the other supernatural powers ascribed to the religious adept. These positions are also deeply in line with the philosophical and religious climate from which the Buddha emerged, most conspicuous in the philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*. For example, the dominant cosmogony in the early Upaniṣads views reality as the result of original movements made by a primordial conscious substance, normally defined as *Ātman* or Brahman.[86]

These intuitions regarding the nature of the relationship between mental conditioning and the objective world suggest an understanding that the mind has power over objects beyond what we normally believe. They suggest also that ontology is secondary to experience. What we are, including the material aspects of our being, is conditioned primarily, if not only, by our previous subjective maneuvers. But these ideas, although they reveal much about underlying Buddhist inclinations, are not really what the twelve links formula is about. The twelve links are an explanation of mental conditioning, an analysis of subjective existence. They do not deal directly with the manner in which things exist; the ontological implications are not much more than an offshoot of the theory.

So far, most of what I have been saying about the twelve links is not very new. While the theory's ontological implications have yet to receive the attention they deserve, the claim that the teaching deals with subjective existence rather than external reality should come as no surprise. The important question for our concerns is whether the twelve links can be

principles, both heavily laden with metaphysics: (1) The early Vedic theory of sacrificial action as the constitutive principle of the universe (see Hull [1990 (1989): ch. 1]) and (2) The Vedic conception of cosmic relations (*bandhus*, see Smith [1989]: ch. 2,3), now transformed into the relationship between moral subjective actions and their fruition in reality. The relevance of the first point to understanding the Buddhist theory of karma is generally acknowledged.

84 Cox (1993: 121–23) has argued that we need not necessarily assume that the connection made between karma and dependent-origination was original. Nonetheless, at least in regard to the twelve link formula, as it is presented here, these two central concepts are naturally connected.

85 For a discussion of *manomaya*, see Hamilton (1996: ch. 7) as well as Harvey (1995: ch. 8).

86 See, for example, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.1, 1.4.10; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2; and *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 1. Regarding the relationship between the twelve links and earlier Vedic and Upaniṣadic materials, Jurewicz (2000) has discussed the relationship between the terms, which constitute the twelve links and their origins in Vedic theories of creation and sacrifice. She makes a convincing case for understanding the Buddhist teaching as an adaptation of Vedic principles connected with the sacrifice. Although she too believes that the focus of the Buddhist teaching is cognitive, her views support the understanding that the early idea of dependent-origination possessed important ontological implications. For further reflection on the ontological significance of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* doctrine, as well as its relation to Vedic and Upaniṣadic cosmological theory as described by Jurewitz, see the section "Dependent-Origination Contextualized" in Shulman (2008).

understood as a private case of a general principle that recognizes that "all that is – exists in dependence." Is there a more general meaning to the abstract formula of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and of the term *idappaccayatā*?

A close reading of the textual passages that contain the abstract formula of dependent-origination shows that this formula deals exclusively with the processes encapsulated in the twelve links. When the Buddha says "When this is, that is, etc.," he speaks *only* of mental conditioning and says absolutely nothing about existence per se. The most significant evidence for this fact is that the phrase "*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*" never occurs detached from the formula of the twelve links, save one occurrence, which I will relate to below.

Let us examine a standard appearance of the abstract formula. In the *Dasabala-sutta*,[87] the Buddha says: "*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti . . . yadidam*[88]: *avijjāpaccayā*" (When this is, that is. . . . That is: depending on ignorance). The abstract formula is followed by *yadidaṃ*, followed by the standard articulation of the twelve links. If *yadidaṃ* meant "for example" or "such as," we could accept the view that the twelve links are a private case of a general principle of conditionality. But it clearly does not. What it does express is more akin to "that is," or even more precisely "that which is." Hence it should be clear that the abstract formula relates precisely and only to the mutual conditioning of the twelve links. This is in fact exactly what it says: "When this (i.e. ignorance, etc.) is, that (i.e. mental dispositions) is. Following the arising of this (ignorance, etc.) arises, that (mental dispositions) arises. When this is not, that is not. Following the cessation of this, that ceases." There is no reason to believe that dependent-origination originally discussed anything but mental conditioning. This is evident in the words of the Buddha in the classic exposition of the twelve links quoted above: "And what, monks, is dependent-origination?" (*katamo ca, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo?*). The answer is a teaching of the twelve links: "Dependent on ignorance, monks." The twelve links *are paṭiccasamuppāda*. As I said earlier, there is one case in which the abstract formula appears without the twelve links in the *Cūḷasakuludāyi-sutta*.[89] But this occurrence is unable to alter our conclusions. The context in which the formula appears involves a discussion regarding the recollection of past lives, an issue closely related to the topic addressed by the twelve

[87] "The discourse on the ten powers," SN II.27–28.
[88] Pāli texts write *yadidaṃ* as one word, which is treated this way also in PED. PED gives: "'as that,' which is this (i. e. the following), may be translated by 'viz.,' that is, 'i. e.' in other words, so to speak, just this, 'I mean.'" Possibly, writing *yad idaṃ* would be more correct.
[89] "The shorter discourse to Sakuludāyin," MN II.32.

links. The Buddha is again speaking about the process of karmic mental conditioning that propels transmigration and structures *saṃsāric* existence.

It should be noted that the same conclusions apply to the term *idappaccayatā*.[90] This concept also should be seen as expressing the insight that every element of experience depends on a specific cause, a "this" that can and should be observed by the practitioner (see chapter 4.2).

A careful reading of passages that are thought to express a general theory of relational existence also shows that it is a mistake to understand them in this way. An oft-quoted passage regarding dependent-origination, usually understood as an example of it referring to all phenomena, appears in the *Paccaya-sutta*.[91] There the Buddha says "Monks, I will teach you dependent-origination and dependently-originated phenomena,"[92] while "dependently-arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanne dhamme*)" presumably refer to any possible object. But in fact, rather than explaining how "phenomena" are "dependently-originated," the sutta continues with the Buddha teaching the twelve links. The Buddha next gives an interesting description of each of the links as "impermanent, compounded, dependently-originated and characterized by waning, by fading, by stopping, by destruction."[93] The connection between being dependently-originated (*paṭicccasamuppanna*) and being impermanent (*anicca*) and compounded (*saṅkhata*) is again emphasized in SN III.97–100 and SN IV.211–214. In the first case the context relates again to a number of the twelve links. The second case relates first to the body and then to the sixth link (*phassa*). These last cases point to the understanding that when the Buddha defines phenomena as dependently-originated he is referring only to objects created by the process of conditioning addressed by the twelve links.[94] Admittedly, at SN IV.211 he speaks of the body. But the body, in this context, is no more than a product of attachment, a material

90 The term *idappaccayatā* is far less frequent than *paṭiccasamuppāda* and follows the same pattern. The *Paccaya-sutta* of the NS (SN II.25) shows that *idappaccayatā* relates to the twelve links. In the APS (MN I.167), when the Buddha hesitates before teaching the dharma, he expresses his doubt whether people will penetrate *idappaccayatā*, which he equates with *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In this case there is again no reason to believe the Buddha is speaking of anything but mental conditioning

91 "The discourse on conditions," SN II.25–27.

92 *Paṭiccasamuppādañ ca vo bhikkhave desessāmi paṭiccasamuppanne ca dhamme.*

93 *Aniccaṃ saṅkhātaṃ paṭiccasamuppannaṃ khayadhammaṃ vayadhammaṃ virāgadhammaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ.*

94 See also the Buddha's statement in the *Indriyabhāvanā-sutta* ("The Discourse on the development of the senses," MN 152, III.298–302), where he characterizes agreeable (*manāpa*), disagreeable, and neutral experiences (presumably sensations) that arise "having felt a tangible object with the body" (*kāyena poṭṭhabbaṃ phusitvā upajjati*) as "conditioned, coarse and *dependently-originated*" (*saṅkhataṃ oḷārikaṃ paṭiccasamuppannaṃ*). Once again, the context is evidently subjective.

expression of the process of conditioning whose locus is experience. This is another case which points to the ontological implications of the twelve links but which is still in accord with the hypothesis that dependent-origination deals only with mental conditioning and the realities, including corporeal reality, which are affected by it. As the Buddha says at SN II.64–65: "This body, monks, does not belong to you or to others; it is to be seen as old conditioned actions (*kamma*), which are to be cognized and felt."[95]

In the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* of the MN, the Buddha defines the five aggregates as dependently-arisen after having emphasized their composite and impermanent nature. This presentation includes an explanation of the material aspect of the *rūpa* aggregate based on the four elements, which the Buddha even defines as "external" (*bāhirā*). He continues by saying:

> Whoever sees dependent origination sees the dhamma, and whoever sees the dhamma sees dependent origination. Dependently arisen indeed are these five aggregates of clinging.[96] The desire toward, inclining toward, basing oneself on, and craving for these five aggregates of clinging is the arising of suffering. The stopping and quitting of desire and passion toward these five aggregates is the cessation of suffering.[97]

The beginning of this paragraph is a classic quote on the importance of dependent-origination, here characterized as the heart of the Buddha's teachings. But again, the text only expresses the way in which saṃsāric *experience* is brought into being. The objects under discussion are the five aggregates, the aspects of subjective existence that come into being through the conditioned processes represented by the twelve links. By saying that *bhava* is conditioned by *upādāna*, the twelve links state that rebirth is caused by the attachments of this life and explain how the five aggregates are born. The aggregates come into being in relation to clinging and are thus characterized as dependently-arisen. Something "external" can be defined as "dependently-originated" given that it is an aspect of subjective being.

[95] *Nāyaṃ, bhikkhave, kāyo tumhākaṃ napi aññesaṃ. Purāṇam idaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ abhisaṅkhataṃ abhisañcetayitaṃ vedaniyaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ.*

[96] The ontological implications discussed above suggest that *upādāna-kkhandhā* are not "the aggregates affected by clinging" but rather "the aggregates caused by clinging," or more simply "the aggregates of clinging." For the understanding that these terms represent the "bundles of burning" that constitute human life in *saṃsāra*, see Hwang (2006: 18–21) and Gombrich (2008: 113–16).

[97] MN I.190–191: *Yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatīti. Paṭiccasamuppannā kho panime yadidaṃ pañcupādānakkhandhā. Yo imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chando ālayo anunayo ajjhosānaṃ so dukkhasamudayo. Yo imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, so dukkhanirodho'ti.*

To summarize what has been said so far, the examples quoted – rare occurrences in which "phenomena" are said to be dependently-arisen – show that dependent-origination is not a general ontological principle that characterizes all objects or things as dependent on objective causes. Rather, if external objects may be thought of as "dependently originated," this should express mainly the idea that they respond to and are generated through subjective input. Yet even this is demanding more than what the texts normally say; the early texts may say that physical reality is "dependently-originated" but they refer by this to the physical aspects of subjective being, mainly to the body. When the Nikāyas describe things as dependently-originated, they are referring only to phenomenal aspects of subjective human experience. Furthermore, the statement that these elements of experience are "dependently-originated" is made in a way that does not conform to what is normally considered as a realistic ontology. We find here a powerful metaphysical assumption, which gives mental life ontological priority over physical reality. It is under this metaphysical assumption that we are to understand the effort toward liberation.

Much of the reading of the twelve links in the early discourses offered here has been anticipated in an article by Collett Cox (1993). Cox traces the path by which Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma philosophers came to understand dependent-origination as an abstract theory of causation, defining the shifts in meaning the doctrine underwent from the early suttas. In the early texts, she claims, *paṭiccasamuppāda* does not function as an abstract theory of causation. Rather, it focuses on the way human suffering is produced and the manner by which it may be terminated. Later Buddhist philosophers developed this early insight into a full-fledged theory of causality. Cox does not specifically address the question I have been concerned with here – whether *paṭiccasamuppāda* relates to all things, rather than dealing exclusively with mental phenomena and more generally with human existence. Nonetheless, the suggestions I have been making fit well with her portrayal of the developments undergone by the concept of dependent-origination: originally a psychological insight, eventually an abstract philosophical principle.[98]

What then is precisely the insight of conditionality that is expressed by the twelve links? Here we recall that the twelve links are no more than a standardized presentation employed by the Nikāyas in order to express an insight that has many other instantiations.[99] Dependent-origination is the

[98] See also Devdas (2008: esp. ch. 3). [99] See also Gombrich (2009: ch. 9, esp. 142–143).

principle that human reality is conditioned by mental acts; it may even be termed "subjective determination." In related expressions of this principle, the list of the twelve links is extended or shortened,[100] and in other cases the principle of arising in dependence characterizes processes of conditioning that have little or no relation to the twelve links. One such case is the second of the three lists of dependent-origination that are treated by the *Mahānidāna-sutta*,[101] which according to Schmithausen (2000) is the discourse in which the earlier structure of the twelve links was first synthesized.[102] The connection between the three lists is made through the concept of "feeling" (*vedanā*). After the Buddha introduces the first list of links 7–12 of the twelve links in reverse order, he continues to underline the centrality of feelings in conditioning human life:

> And here, Ānanda, thirst depends on feeling, seeking depends on thirst, acquisition depends on seeking, firm opinion depends on acquisition, impassioned desire depends on firm opinion, attachment depends on impassioned desire, seizing depends on attachment, selfishness depends on seizing, guarding depends on selfishness.
>
> Having guarding as their main cause, the lifting of the stick, the drawing of the sword, fights, quarrels, arguments, contention, slander, lying and many (other) bad unwholesome states come to be.[103]

This list of conflict-ridden states, which are caused by feeling and desire, shares with the twelve links not much more than the underlying principle of subjective conditioning. Most significant, this expression of conditionality diverges from the twelve links also in that it says nothing about rebirth. This passage again emphasizes the subjective nature of the processes of conditioning discussed by the Buddha under the title of dependent-origination. Another illuminating example is the NS's *Cetanā-sutta* ("The discourse on intention"):

> Monks, what one thinks, intends and dwells on becomes a support for the stabilizing of consciousness. When there is a support, there is an establish ment of consciousness. This consciousness being established and having grown, there is future rebirth in renewed existence. There being future

[100] See note 71. [101] "The great discourse on conditions," DN 15, II.55–71.
[102] See note 72.
[103] DN II. 58–59: *Iti kho panetaṃ, ānanda, vedanaṃ paṭicca taṇhā, taṇhaṃ paṭicca pariyesanā, pariyesanaṃ paṭicca lābho, lābhaṃ paṭicca vinicchayo, vinicchayaṃ paṭicca chandarāgo, chandarāgaṃ paṭicca ajjhosānaṃ, ajjhosānaṃ paṭicca pariggaho, pariggahaṃ paṭicca macchariyaṃ, macchariyaṃ paṭicca ārakkho. Ārakkhādhikaraṇaṃ daṇḍādānasatthādānakalahaviggahavivāda-tuvaṃtuvaṃpesuññ amusāvādā aneke pāpakā akusalā dhammā sambhavanti*. Here I quote from the Pāli text, which relates the same ideas discussed by Schmithausen in relation to the Sarvāstivādin version.

> rebirth in renewed existence, birth, aging and death old age and death, sorrow, pain, suffering, distress and misery arise. This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.[104]

This passage surely matches statements made in the presentation of the twelve links but also supplements it in important ways. The process of conditioning described here emphasizes the propelling force of subjective conscious effort – one is reborn conditioned by "what one thinks, intends and dwells on." Subjective acts of conditioning possess creative potency and determine objective realities. But although these results of conditioning include objective aspects, they are all entirely a part of human existence – what is conditioned is nothing other than human transmigration in the round of rebirths.

Another relevant statement comes from the *Atthirāga-sutta*. Here the focus is on the concept of "nutriment" (*āhāra*).

> If toward the food nutriment there is passion, delight, thirst there consciousness is established and grows. Where consciousness is established and grows, there is appearance of name and form. Where there is appear ance of name and form, there is growth of formations. Where there is growth of formations, there is future rebirth in renewed existence. Where there is future rebirth in renewed existence there are future birth, old age and death. Where there are future birth, old age and death, there, I say, monks, there is sorrow, terror and misery.[105]

The text repeats this statement, regarding the other three types of nutriment, those of contact (*phassa*), mental volition (*manosañcetanā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). We see that this concept of "nutriment" functions in a similar way to the processes of dependent-origination described by the twelve links – subjective acts of attraction toward the four types of nutriment that shape consciousness and rebirth. Like the previous sources quoted, this passage emphasizes the subjective drive that directs the process of conditioning. Once again, what conditions is subjective input; what is conditioned is physical human existence.

[104] SN II. 65–66: *Bhikkhave, ceteti yañ ca pakappeti yañ ca anuseti, ārammaṇam etaṃ hoti viññāṇassa ṭhitiyā. Ārammaṇe sati patiṭṭhā viññāṇassa hoti. Tasmiṃ patiṭṭhite viññāṇe virūḷhe āyatiṃ punabbhavābhinibbatti hoti. Āyatiṃ punabbhavābhinibbattiyā sati āyatiṃ jāti jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkh andhassa samudayo hoti*. This statement is duplicated in the two discourses that follow this one as well.

[105] SN II.101: *Kabaḷīkāre ce, bhikkhave, āhāre atthi rāgo atthi nandī atthi taṇhā, patiṭṭhitaṃ tattha viññāṇaṃ virūḷhaṃ. Yattha patiṭṭhitaṃ viññāṇaṃ virūḷhaṃ, atthi tattha nāmarūpassa avakkanti. Yattha atthi nāmarūpassa avakkanti, atthi tattha saṅkhārānaṃ vuddhi. Yattha atthi saṅkhārānaṃ vuddhi, atthi tattha āyatiṃ punabbhavābhinibbatti. Yattha atthi āyatiṃ punabbhavābhinibbatti, atthi tattha āyatiṃ jātijarāmaraṇaṃ. Yattha atthi āyatiṃ jātijarāmaraṇaṃ, sasokaṃ taṃ, bhikkhave, sadaraṃ saupāyāsanti vadāmi*.

We find that the early Buddhist texts identify many processes of human conditioning and express a clear interest in studying their phenomenology. Defining and categorizing all the relevant concepts are beyond our present interests, which is mainly to understand the early notion of conditionality and to see that it is ultimately designed in order to enhance the capacity for phenomenological observation. This phenomenological aspect of the doctrine has been emphasized by Yamada (1980), who demonstrated that the original presentation of the twelve links was in backward order so that their initial articulation is actually reversed; rather than starting with the first link and progressing according to a linear sequence, the original method was to search for the causes and conditions of particular events or concepts and then to analyze their conditions, etc. According to Yamada, the "natural sequence" of observing *paṭiccasamuppāda* was when the Buddha asks, regarding each of the links, a question of the sort of "when what exists is there (e.g.) old age and death, depending on what is there (e.g.) old age and death?"[106] The answer is the link before it, in this case, "birth," to which the same question is then applied, and so on. Dependent-origination thus emerges as a concept that is used in order to inquire into the processes of conditioning that give rise to specific events and to empower the practitioner's perception of the operating causal factors in the mind. We are speaking of a broad category, which helps one analyze her personal, conscious reality in direct and concrete fashion. The focus is on realizing the very reality of conditionality and on giving one tools to alter and hopefully to diminish the power of negative forces that are operating in the mind.

The interest in diverse processes of conditioning is expressed by the *Āhāra-sutta*, a discourse devoted to an analysis of the four types of nutriment referred to above. Here the Buddha says:

> "These four nutriments, monks what is their condition (*nidāna*), from what is their arising (*samudaya*), from what are they born (*jāti*), from what do they emerge (*pabhava*)? These four nutriments have thirst as their condition, their arising is from thirst, their birth is from thirst, they emerge from thirst."[107]

The Buddha then asks the same questions regarding thirst, tracing the conditions of arising back to the first link of ignorance. This text betrays a

[106] SN II.10: *Kimhi nu kho sati jarāmaraṇaṃ hoti, kiṃpaccayā jarāmaraṇan'ti*. This quote is taken from the *Gotama-sutta* of the NS (no. 10), which is the paradigmatic text for Yamada's approach to *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

[107] SN II.11: *Ime, bhikkhave, cattāro āhārā kiṃnidānā kiṃsamudayā kiṃjātikā kiṃpabhavā? Ime cattāro āhārā taṇhānidānā taṇhāsamudayā taṇhājātikā taṇhāpabhavā.*

concern with different aspects of the conditioning process, seen here to be based on "conditions" (*nidānas*, in other places *paccaya*[108]), "arising" (*samudaya*), on "being born" (*jāti*), and "emerging" (*pabhava*). Other texts will add yet more terms to describe the processes of conditioning.[109] An especially interesting case of this diversity is the *Kalahavivāda-sutta* of the AV,[110] regarded by Nakamura (1980) as the earliest textual evidence for the doctrine of dependent-origination in the Pāli canon. This discourse uses the concept of *nidāna* to analyze the process by which different mental processes are generated. Some of these processes are equal to the ones discussed by the twelve links but others are new.[111]

Rather than following Nakamura in seeing the *Kalahavivāda-sutta*'s presentation of conditionality as an earlier version of this principle, I prefer to see it as another example of the method of inquiry that is at the base of the doctrine: all aspects of human existence are conditioned by subjective acts and that the early Buddhist tradition studied these processes of conditioning and defined them in diverse ways.[112] The *Kalahavivāda-sutta* suggests that this insight is a very ancient one in the Buddhist tradition and that it formed a central aspect of the early Buddhist meditative culture. This society studied and classified the causal, determining processes that are at the root of experience.

We may notice that the insight into the functioning of dependent-origination relates to different aspects of existence, including ordinary states of mind; conditionality is real not only in deep meditative visions. Nevertheless, the analysis of the conditions by which human reality is generated – especially when this analysis moves backward from a specific experience to its causes, as described by Yamada – suggests a concrete rather than an abstract envisioning of the process of conditioning. At least one text even defines this perception of the working of dependent-origination as "inner reflection" (*antaraṃ sammasaṃ*).[113]

[108] See for example in the *paccaya-sutta* quoted above, pp. 190–191.

[109] For a relatively rich example, see AN 8.83 (IV. 338) and AN 10.58 (V.106)

[110] SNip 862–77.

[111] See also the commentary to SNip 1043 in the *Cūlanidessa*, which equates the terms *mūla, hetu, nidāna, saṃbhava, pabhava, samuṭṭhāna, āhāra, ārammana, paccaya*, and *samudaya*: The text glosses *Mūladassāvi* as *mūladassāvī hetudassāvī nidānadassāvī sambhavadassāvī pabhavadassāvī samuṭṭhānadassāvī āhāradassāvī ārammaṇadassāvī paccayadassāvī samudayadassāvī*.

[112] See also Vetter (1990: 49).

[113] This is the *Sammasa-sutta* at SN II.107–12. See also the *Dutiyāsutavā-sutta*, where the Buddha states (SN II.96): "The learned disciple of the noble ones applies his mind correctly and thoroughly to dependent-origination" (*sutavā ariyasāvako paṭiccasamuppādaṃ yeva sādhukaṃ yoniso manasi karoti*). The Buddha then proceeds to preach the abstract formula of dependent-origination followed by the twelve links.

It is also interesting to notice that among the terms that are chosen by texts like the *Āhāra-sutta* to depict the functioning of conditioning – such as *nidāna*, *pabhava*, or *paccaya* – is also the term "arising" (*samudaya*), which is central to the account of the second noble truth. In fact, in a number of discourses in the NS, the Buddha singles out this concept, together with its complementing concept of "cessation" (*nirodha*) that defines the third noble truth, as the central insights of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In these texts,[114] the Buddha narrates his eureka-like discovery of the most fundamental features of the conditioning processes that lead one to suffering and to rebirth, or alternatively, to freedom and liberation: "'Arising, arising' . . . 'cessation, cessation,' thus, regarding things unheard of previously, there arose in me the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, the light."[115] The formula that accompanies the visions of arising and of cessation here is precisely the one that follows the understanding of the 4NTs in the DCP. This focus on the same terms *samudaya* and *nirodha* – arising and cessation – coupled with the repeating of the same unique formula describing the occurrence of understanding and joined by the fact that the exposition of the twelve links states that they express the arising and cessation *of suffering* all strongly suggest an intimate relationship between the two fundamental teachings of dependent-origination and of the 4NTs. In fact, surprisingly, we may even notice that the so-called "abstract" or "generalized" formula of dependent-origination, like the articulation of the 4NTs in the fourth *jhāna* we discussed in the previous chapter, may not be so abstract and general; these formulas are all based on the concrete and present *idaṃ* – "this."

We will return to reflect on the relationship between *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the 4NTs in Chapter 4, which is devoted to the textual description of the latter. For now, let us be clear on what we have identified: the textual presentation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the twelve links as well as in many other expressions of the teaching express one central vision – that human existence is subjectively conditioned. All aspects of human reality, most notably human experience, come into being due to subjective input. This understanding tells us something about the Buddhist intuition regarding the nature of reality, which is characteristic of classical Indian systems of thought – objective reality is subjectively determined. But this ontological

[114] These are suttas 6–10 and 65 of the NS.

[115] SN II.105: *Samudayo, samudayo'ti… nirodho, nirodho'ti kho me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi.*

understanding is not the focus of the teaching of dependent-origination, which is interested mainly in the dynamics of experienced human life.

2.2.2 The Middle

The early understanding of the middle-path will further substantiate the understanding that dependent-origination deals only with subjective existence. Dependent-origination functions as the definition of the middle (*majjha*), which avoids the extremes of eternalism (*sassata*) and extinction (*uccheda*). Both these extremes represent a mistaken conception regarding the self. In this respect, the twelve links articulate the early Buddhist understanding of the person, who experiences continuity although she has no self: no S/self exists, but the idea that the self is completely void is also erroneous. By offering the notion of mental conditioning portrayed by the twelve links, Buddhist thought supplies a positive articulation of the functioning of experience devoid of an essential gravitational center.[116] This emphasizes once again that dependent-origination is concerned with the workings of subjectivity.

There exist different definitions of the extreme positions of *sassata* and *uccheda*.[117] The BJS defines *sassata* as a mistaken view that "the self and the world are eternal" produced by an ability to recall past lives in meditation or by logical analysis; *uccheda* consists in the belief that personal existence is completely annihilated at the end of life.[118] A more pragmatic definition of the extremes appears in the *Acelakassapa-sutta*,[119] which presents eternalism as the idea that the one who acts (*so karoti*) is the same as the one who experiences the result of the act (*so paṭisaṃvedayati*), while the idea that the two are completely distinct amounts to extinction. In a similar context, the *Timbaruka-sutta*[120] defines *sassata* as the belief that feeling (*vedanā*) and

[116] The point that the twelve links serve as a definition of the nature of experience devoid of a true self is widely accepted. See Collins (1982: ch. 2, esp. 103–10); Gethin (1998: 140–46); Gombrich (1988: 63); Piyadassi Thera (1959: 37–42); Rahula (1974 [1959]: ch. 6); and Ronkin (2005: 194–98).

[117] An important divergent case is the oft-quoted *Kaccānagotta-sutta* (SN II.17), which names the extremes *atthita* and *natthita*, "existence" and "non-existence." It can be shown that these terms refer to *sassata* and *uccheda* and should not be understood to imply abstract notions of existence and non-existence. The key to this reading is that the sutta defines the view *atta me* ("*my* self") as the root of the erroneous extremes. Bhikku Bodhi (2000: 734, n.29) too believes the *Kaccānagotta-sutta* to discuss the extremes of *sassata* and *uccheda*.

[118] The relevant passages are DN I.13 and I.40–41. The discussion here of the BJS is only a very rough outline of its colorful expression. This sutta devotes four different views to *sassata*, followed by four more to *ekaccasassta* ("partial-eternalism"). Many of the other views it presents deal with *sassata* implicitly. The sutta discusses *Uccheda* in views 51–57.

[119] "The discourse to the naked ascetic Kassapa." The relevant passage is at SN II.20.

[120] "The discourse to Timbaruka." The relevant passage is at SN II.23.

feeler (*so vedayati*) are one; *uccheda* means that feeler and feeling are distinct.[121] Both of these last suttas conduct their discussion in relation to the question of whether suffering is caused by self (what would be equal to eternalism) or by another (that would equal annihilation), clearly a question regarding the nature of subjective experience and not of objective reality.

This short presentation should suffice in order to show that the conceptual definition of the middle-path in the early teachings deals with the nature of the self as an aspect of subjective existence. *Sassata* addresses a belief in the true existence of a self as an essential entity continuous over time. *Uccheda* is based on the true existence of the self as well, but thinks it will be annihilated at the end of this life or at the end of an act. It also tends toward a denial of moral responsibility. The definition of the middle is therefore meant to correct a misunderstanding regarding the nature of the self that is represented by the two extremes. It says next to nothing about abstract notions of existence. In many cases, the twelve links appear after the Buddha states that "avoiding both extremes the Tathāgata teaches a doctrine abiding by the middle."[122] This demonstrates, once more, that dependent-origination intends to explain experience without the assumption of a self. It does so through offering the notion of conditioning as a middle way between the absolute existence and non-existence of the self. What the middle-path means in the context of early Buddhism, as it is articulated by the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, is that there exists no true self but that there is still personal continuity, given that the sequence of conditioning never stops.

2.4 Summary

This chapter aimed to provide an overall framework for the study of early Buddhist philosophy. It discussed three central teachings that sketch the basic contours of the early Buddhist system of thought – the unanswered questions, selflessness, and the notion of conditionality expressed through the concept of dependent-origination. While specific arguments were

[121] The *Timbaruka-sutta* does not use the terms *sassata* and *uccheda* explicitly but calls both the views it expresses "extremes" (*ante*). The formulation of extreme positions in this discourse – as the sameness or difference of *vedanā* and *so vedayati* – is more complex than other definitions we referred to, which are clear in defining *sassata* and *uccheda* in relation to the temporal continuity of a subjective element. The *Timbaruka-sutta* continues the discussion conducted in the *Acelakassapa-sutta*, and I suggest reading its formulation in light of it. The point seems to be that understanding "the feeler and the feeling" as either one and the same or as distinct demands a substantial and essential subjective agent, a self.

[122] *Ubhe ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṃ deseti.*

made regarding the way all three of these teachings have been understood in modern scholarship, it would be useful as a summary to focus on the general picture they portray and on the way they relate to the broader concerns of this study. Simply put, the discussion demonstrated that early Buddhist philosophy had little interest in abstract theory but rather concerned itself with an analysis of human existence and with the dynamics of human subjectivity. This scrutiny of mental life was embedded in a metaphysical position that accepted the reality of rebirth and believed that liberation from the round of rebirths is possible through a correct approach to mental contents; one way to do this is not to regard them as one's self or as belonging to one's self. This philosophy had a practical aim of leading its students to liberation by generating an attitude of detachment.

We have treated here early Buddhist philosophical doctrines that do not necessarily relate to *samādhi* meditation; early Buddhist philosophy was plainly not *only* about meditative visions. But we can easily see how experiences of Buddhist truth in *samādhi* are natural to the concerns of the tradition whose doctrines we discussed. Buddhist thought was interested mainly in human existence, and its main venue of inquiry was into the working of the mind. This inquiry was couched in a powerful metaphysical framework, but the analysis itself did not require belief (although Māluṅkya's questions that lead up to the simile of the arrow hint that it was difficult to conduct with no belief). Ultimately or ideally, engagement with the philosophy was supposed to allow the people practicing it to experience liberating events. In order to produce these deeply significant moments, a profound intimacy with the observations that are at the base of the philosophical truths was required. *Samādhi* meditation was apparently one particularly important ground where such an acquaintance could have been cultivated and where transformative events could take place. Meditation corresponds in this case to what we would normally consider as intense study. Whatever the verdict regarding the precise role of *samādhi*, an extreme ideal of a lived philosophy seems to be at work.

In order to better appreciate the manner in which Buddhist philosophy is meant to be liberating, we must now begin to penetrate the world of early Buddhist meditation. This we will do in the next chapter, which focuses on the early Buddhist notion of "mindfulness," *sati*. There we will see how philosophy can be integrated into one's vision so that it becomes a spontaneous form of perception. Only a mind that has become fully receptive to Buddhist truth will be prepared to attain awakening in *samādhi*.

CHAPTER 3

Mindfulness, or How Philosophy Becomes Perception

In the previous chapter, early Buddhist philosophy was shown to be concerned mainly with the nature of subjective reality; its focus was on understanding mental processes and their aftermaths in the determination of rebirth.[1] Although couched in a complicated metaphysical framework, this system of thought was designed primarily to allow its students to alter their psychological reality in order to help them change the fundamental fact of intense, possibly endless, conditioning. This philosophical tradition had little interest in pure theory as it was driven by practical aims – philosophical insights were meant to be employed in the transformative project of liberation. We will now take an important step toward understanding the early Buddhist transformative project as we begin to connect philosophy and meditation and examine the manner in which Buddhist ideas were meant to be directly experienced in meditation.

How are the two main aspects of Buddhist philosophy – theory and religious transformation – connected? How is it that an understanding of Buddhist truth can be liberating in any, real sense?[2] In order to obtain an answer for these questions – indeed in order to understand early Buddhist philosophy – we must come to terms with philosophy as a meditative phenomenon, or more specifically as a form of meditative practice. The early Buddhist discourses are clear that meditation is the primary context in which Buddhist philosophical insights were meant to be "used." At least ideally, for the dedicated students of the Buddhist path, theoretical and conceptual philosophical positions were meant, first and foremost, to transform experience; philosophy was to be contemplated, internalized, and eventually weaved into the very structure of perception. The practitioner was meant to learn not only to

[1] Large parts of this chapter have been adapted from Shulman (2010).
[2] This question has been developed and discussed by Burton (2004). See section 1.3.2.

think of reality according to the Buddhist philosophical vision but also *to see* all events of his life, and especially the mental events he encounters in meditation, in a manner that corresponds to their philosophical value. Perception was to be molded by philosophy, and meditation was the workshop where this molding was meant to take place.

It may be easier to understand this irregular notion of philosophy in light of a more routine observation regarding the power inherent in human thinking. Why is it, for example, that the vast majority of human beings entertain more or less the same religious beliefs and political ideologies as their parents (or of different significant others)? Why do they normally approach their culture in similar ways and entertain corresponding ideologies and values? Surely a nearly infinite list of conditions could be compiled to answer this question (while the modern mind immediately thinks of genetic causes). Also, every case is unique in some way or another, and in many cases children actively pursue an alternative to what they conceive of as the mistakes or shortcomings of their parents. Nevertheless, most people do fundamentally follow in their caregiver's footsteps – culturally and ideologically. Why?

A simple and straightforward answer to this question must take into account the fact that reality is always experienced through subjective cognitive structures. No one ever experiences reality in the abstract, hypothetical *tabula rasa*. Thus, naturally, people learn to think, feel, and experience reality in a way that is similar to their parents; they are also conditioned to approach reality in line with what the communities they grow up in regard as true and valuable. As a child develops up, she learns not only to speak, to read and to write in the language(s) that her parents speak, but also to think and express herself in the emotional and ideological language cultivated in the social world she lives in. In the words of the anthropologist Basil Bernstein, quoted by Mary Douglas in her *Natural Symbols*:

> As the child learns his speech or in our terms learns specific codes which regulate his verbal acts he learns the requirements of his social structure. From this point of view every time the child speaks the social structure of which he is part is reinforced in him, and his social identity is developed and constrained. The social structure becomes for the developing child his psychological reality by the shaping of his acts of speech. If this is the case, then the processes which orient the child to his world and the kind of relationships he imposes are triggered off initially and systematically reinforced by the implications of the speech system. Underlying the general

> pattern of the child's speech are initial sets of choices, in built preferences for some alternative rather than others, planning processes which develop and are stabilized through time coding principles through which orienta tion is given to social, intellectual and emotional referents.[3]

Bernstein and Douglas focus on language, but the processes they describe are of a comprehensive psychological nature. From our point of view, it is important to realize that once the child has become accustomed to generating her personal reality in a manner that reflects the surroundings in which she grew to become herself, she *sees* and *experiences* reality accordingly. People's minds are thus the products of their cultures and upbringing. To take a few mundane examples, just as a car salesman will notice people's cars and intuitively judge a person according to the vehicle he drives, as an ardent twenty-first century environmentalist will get angry when he sees his neighbor disposing garbage that could have been recycled, as the scholar and "the cowherd" (in the sense he is portrayed in Indian philosophical discourse as a simpleton) will see each other's basic experiences as dull or unsatisfactory, so did the dedicated students of the early Buddhist path grow accustomed to appreciate things as impermanent and as painful. The Buddhist meditator could be compared to an expert musician whose heightened listening sensitivities allow him to be uniquely attuned to the subtle overtones and movements within a musical composition and to assess their value according to his personal preferences and schooling. The practitioner of Buddhist meditation, too, learns to apprehend ever more refined elements of his experience, which he interprets according to the way he has been guided by his tradition.

Obviously, my examples are simplistic; the modern environmentalist may, for instance, be a Buddhist practitioner who has made some advances in relation to his propensity for anger. He may then approach his neighbor and patiently explain the advantages of taking responsibility for the effects we produce in the world we live in and thus sublimate his anger. Nonetheless, even if he is able not to react impulsively, he would be demonstrating the functioning of the same principle by which his mind behaved prior to his acquaintance with Buddhist attitudes to life: mind is conditioned to experience reality in a particular way; mental attitudes forge the very structure of experience. As much as this principle constrains, so it

[3] Douglas (2003 [1970]: 27). Douglas distinguishes between two types of linguistic codes that families employ in the process of the parallel acquisition of language and of the family role system. She thus speaks of "[T]wo basic categories of speech, distinguishable *both linguistically and sociologically*" (p. 24, emphasis mine).

offers opportunities to manipulate conditioning in a manner that accords with one's values. Early Buddhism was aware of this principle and made active use of it.

This straightforward understanding of human psychology is supported by a basic principle in the neurology of human learning, known as the Hebb rule. This principle, formulated by Donald Hebb in his 1949 *The Organization of Behavior*, explains learning as the strengthening of the connection between two neurons, or between groups of neurons, which exchange information.[4] When neurons communicate, the connection between them is fortified and their capacity for further communication is facilitated. On the other hand, when a connection between neurons is left unused, it dies out. Learning is thus depicted as the enhancement and acceleration of active neural patterns – activated networks are strengthened, while inert ones are lost. This simple but ingenious rule thus offers an explanation for the way human experience – including Buddhist analytical meditation – affects the structure of the brain; when a student of Buddhist philosophy systematically cultivates and reflects on the insights he has learned, this changes not only his cognitive inclinations but their neurological foundation as well. Sustained reflection carried out in a specific manner will not only change any theoretical position one entertains but will transform the very structure of experience.

Intuitively aware of this basic psychological reality, early Buddhism made conscious use of the power inherent in systematic reflection. Philosophy was thus employed in order to create distinct patterns of experience. We learned in the previous chapter that Buddhist thought was concerned mainly with an analysis of experience. Here we add to this understanding that this analysis was supposed to be cultivated and practiced in meditation in order to transform cognitive and emotional structures. Ultimately and ideally, this application of philosophy was meant to be liberating; when one learned to view all events that take place in her mind according to the Buddhist perception of reality, she was prepared for liberation. Paradigmatically, this happened when a full-blown, continuous perception of Buddhist truth was realized in deep *samādhi* meditation.

[4] Hebb (1949: 62): "Let us assume then that the persistence of repetition of a reverberatory activity (or "trace") tends to induce lasting cellular changes that add to its stability. The assumption can be precisely stated as follows: *When an axon of cell A is near enough to excite a cell* B *and repeatedly or persistently takes part in firing it, some growth process or metabolic change takes place in one or both cells such that* A*'s efficiency, as one of the cells firing* B, *is increased*" (emphasis in the original). For examples of the importance and current relevance of Hebbian principles, see Bliss and Collingridge (1993: 31) and Firston (2010: 133). I thank Prof. Rafi Malach for directing me to these last two sources.

In order to catalyze realization, different meditations were developed so that the mind would gain full intimacy with the favored philosophical position. An important group of these meditations are classified under the category of "the establishing of mindfulness" – *satipaṭṭhāna*, which are the main focus of this chapter. These meditations aim to "establish" (*paṭṭhāna*) "mindfulness" (*sati*), which is an active form of attention whose full fruition occurs when it spontaneously and immediately sees Buddhist truth. Buddhist philosophy supplies the conceptual background for these meditations; philosophy was thus meant to mature gradually into an attitude or internalized position that would inform the way meditators regard any perceptual object or event they encounter.

The concept that interests us here is *sati*, "mindfulness," which figures prominently in the description of liberation we studied in the first chapter. *Sati* is possibly the most central characteristic of the meditative, *jhānic* states in which liberation is said to take place, together with *Upekkhā* ("equanimity") and *visuddhi* ("purity"). Like other Buddhist concepts or theories treated in this study, *sati* is a term that has often been misunderstood; all too commonly it has been romanticized as a "bare awareness" that "naturally sees things as they are." While this image may be important to the Buddhist tradition, and although it may reflect some realities of meditative practice, it does not accord with the way *sati* is characterized in the early scriptures.[5]

The discussion of *sati* in the following pages will rely mainly on a close reading of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* ("The discourse on the establishing of mindfulness," henceforth SPS),[6] which provides the central textual presentation of the subject. I will refer at times to other texts that will highlight different aspects of the SPS's presentation of *sati*, such as the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* ("The discourse on mindfulness intent on the body," MN 118, henceforth KGSS) or the *Ānāpānasati-sutta* ("The discourse on mindfulness of breathing," MN 119, henceforth ĀSS). Still, my approach here is that in order to maintain a strong focus on the central issues, it is

[5] Numerous papers in the recent edition of *Contemporary Buddhism* devoted to mindfulness, such as Bodhi (2011), Gethin (2011), and Oldenzki (2011) are aware of the discrepancy between the modern presentation of mindfulness and its early, traditional contexts.

[6] The SPS appears in the MN (10, I.55) and is reproduced as the first part of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* of the DN (22, II.290–315). In this second text, in the penultimate section of the SPS in which the Buddha relates the 4NTs, a discourse on this topic is inserted that is modeled on the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta* ("The exposition of the [four] truths," MN 141, III.248–52). In the discussion below, I will be referring to the SPS as it appears in the MN although my basic arguments apply to the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* just as well. Regarding the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, see also Sujato (2006: 180–181) who believes it to be "a leading contender for the title of the latest discourse in the four Nikāyas."

best to focus on one, seminal text. It is probably true that the SPS has gone through a complex process of development, which suggests that it may even be one of the latest discourses to reach the form in which we find it today and thus was heavily affected by overly creative redactions. There are also many divergences between the extant versions of this text in different languages and differences between it and its commentaries.[7] Nevertheless, from the point of view of the present study, the SPS can be relied on as a reliable expression of the early notion of "mindfulness." This is mainly true since all the texts that treat the topic of mindfulness in the early canon with any detail, including the Chinese versions of the SPS and the Pāli and Chinese KGSS, coalesce with the basic view of mindfulness articulated in the SPS as it will be presented here.[8] That is, all of these texts include meditations that reflect on Buddhist philosophical understandings in a practical and concrete fashion; they were created in order to stimulate a unique, embodied encounter with the truth of impermanence and the painful, transitory nature of human life. These meditations were designed to carefully and systematically turn philosophical understanding into perceptual nature. *Satipaṭṭhāna* thus emerges as a method by which philosophy is turned into an active way of seeing.

The study of mindfulness has profited lately from a valuable contribution, Tse-fu Kuan's *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*. This book cuts through many of the common perceptions regarding mindfulness, most notably those generated within the Theravādin tradition, and offers new insights regarding the early use of them. Based on a wide variety of sources from the early discourses and from commentarial and *Abhidharma* literature,

7 Kuan (2008: esp. ch. 5) has shown that there is good reason to believe that the SPS is a relatively late discourse, which may have been produced close to the Buddha's death or shortly after it. Therefore, it most probably does not transmit the "original" version of the teaching; see also Sujato (2006: 150). Kuan (esp. pp. 106–107) is thus critical of scholarly attempts to define the original version of the text, such as those developed by Schmithausen (1976), Bronkhorst (1985), and Ven. Sujato (2006). Kuan's conclusions are reinforced by a comparison of the Pāli SPS with its commentaries and with the extant Chinese versions (see Anālayo [2011]: 73–97). A complex picture emerges, which even includes differences between the Pāli SPS and the Pāli commentaries (see for example the differences from the *Vibhaṅga* on pp. 80 and 91 of Anālayo's study). Above all, Kuan has shown that the SPS has gone through a complex process of synthesis and development.

In this respect of the search for origins, it may be more fruitful to follow the suggestion of Anālayo (2003: 16; 2011: 92) and to view the four applications of mindfulness as a primitive Buddhist category. It is possible even that the "application of mindfulness" itself should be viewed as the primitive term, as there are instances when the Buddha speaks of mindfulness of the body alone as in MN III.89 or in AN I.43 (but, in this regard, see Cox, 1992: 69) or passages on three *satipaṭṭhānā*, as in MN III.221.

8 For the Chinese version of these texts, I have relied on the translations in Kuan (2008: Appendices 1 and 2) as well as on the discussion in Anālayo (2011). In this context, it should be noted that the fourth meditation on the disgusting nature of the body parts, possibly the paradigmatic case for the reading of the SPS I will develop, appears in all extant versions of the text.

Kuan makes two important points for our discussion. First, he shows that there is an intimate connection between mindfulness and *saññā*, which Kuan defines as conceptuality or apperception and for which I prefer the more encompassing "perception." Kuan shows that mindfulness is a conceptual, meditative technique, which is employed in order to direct the mind toward wholesome and beneficial attitudes.[9] Second, in the third chapter of his book, Kuan elaborates on the relationship between *sati* and *samatha* meditation and on important textual statements regarding the functioning of *sati* in *jhāna*. He thus shows that the Theravādin preference to see *sati* as a form of *vipassanā* or insight meditation and as *the true* Buddhist meditation that has nothing to do with *samādhi* is insensitive to the original context of mindfulness.[10]

This chapter will make two central claims. The first will be made in the next section, which focuses on the SPS – *Sati* is a method of meditation that is designed to patiently teach the mind to spontaneously experience reality in accord with Buddhist philosophical positions. The second, made in the following section, is that this method of meditation is intimately related to the practice of *jhāna*. These two points together will prepare us for appreciating the 4NTs as a meditative phenomenon that is to be directly perceived, rather than theoretically contemplated, in *jhāna*.

3.1 The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta's* presentation of mindfulness

The SPS is among the most important and well-known early Buddhist texts, a paradigmatic teaching of meditative practice.[11] In this discourse, the Buddha instructs his audience of monks on what he defines as the "one path" (*ekāyana*)[12] that will lead to the full annihilation of all negative forces present in the mind and to the realization of *nibbāna*. This "one path"

9 The relationship between *sati* and *saññā* is at the heart of Chapter 1 of Kuan's book. See especially p. 16 where he identifies a number of examples according to which "*saññā* and *sati* seem to refer to the same thing."

10 This point has been echoed by Gethin (2011: 273).

11 On the SPS as a paradigmatic teaching of meditation, Gethin (2001 [1992]: 66) states: "[W]ith the four *satipaṭṭhānas* we have the nearest thing in the four Nikāyas to basic general instruction in Buddhist '[meditation] practice' or *yoga*." *Satipaṭṭhāna* is more often than not classified as a form of *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, but as Kuan (2008) has shown, this prevalent tendency is probably mistaken with regard to the earlier practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

12 Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 1188–89, n.135) and Anālayo (2003: 27–29) translate *ekāyana maggo* as the "direct path." For a fuller discussion of this term, see Gethin (2001 [1992]: 59–66). Kuan (2008: ch.5, esp. 128–31) suggests that the Pāli statement that defines *satipaṭṭhāna* as *ekāyana* is an interpolation. He also convincingly argues in favor of understanding the term as referring to a "comprehensive or 'all-inclusive' path."

consists of a direction of the attention toward four parallel domains – the four *sati-paṭṭhānas* (*cattāro sati-paṭṭhānā*), commonly translated as the "foundations," the "applications," or the "establishing" (*paṭṭhāna*) of "mindfulness" (*sati*).[13] Although the way these practices are defined in the text poses some difficulty for the translator,[14] they basically refer to specific ways of meditating on (1) the body, (2) feelings, (3) the mind, and (4) *dhammas*, in this context usually referred to as "mental objects."[15]

For our concerns, it is crucial to understand the fusion of the functions of memory and attention that is the central characteristic of *sati*. This will help us appreciate the way Buddhist philosophical understanding informs and determines meditative observation, since the latter has been shaped to perceive Buddhist truth. This understanding of *sati* blatantly contrasts with the common western association regarding "mindfulness," which tends to view it as a clear and unelaborated form of attention. Yet *sati*, as the equivalent of Sanskrit *smṛti*, is a term whose primary meaning is "memory" or "recollection." At the same time, in a very broad sense, it means "consciousness," "awareness," or "knowledge" or in the more specific context of Buddhist meditation – "mindfulness," in the sense of a wholesome application of attention. This second meaning is generally taken to be the one at play in the SPS, and *sati* is thus understood as a unique ability, perhaps a potential, of the mind to be in continuous and intense contact with its object. *Sati* is therefore commonly conceived of as a highly focused

[13] Examples of translations for *Satipaṭṭhānā* as "foundations of mindfulness" are in Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995) and in Holder (2006); as "applications of mindfulness" in Cox (1993); and as "establishing of mindfulness" in Gethin (2001 [1992], ch. 1). For further discussion of the meaning of the term, see Gethin (2001 [1992]: 30–33); Anālayo (2003: 29–30); and Kuan (2008: 104).

[14] The difficulty arises since the object of meditation appears twice in the sentence "*bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati*" (followed by the same structure regarding the three other domains). Translators have each offered their own solutions for this passage (for example, Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi render it as "abides contemplating the body as a body"; Soma Thera translates "he lives contemplating the body in the body"; and Cox (1993: 70) gives "abides observing the feelings in the feelings"). See also Kuan (2008: 112–14). I translate "The monk who is an observer of the body, abides in the body" (see also my translation of the refrain in section 3.1).

[15] The specific term chosen for *dhammā* in this context may vary (for example, "mind-objects" in Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995) and "mental phenomena" in Holder [2006]), but translators are almost unanimous in believing that *dhammā* is a general term for objects of the mind. Anālayo (2003: 182–83) criticizes this translation and states that in this context *dhammā* are better understood as Buddhist schemes according to which one analyzes one's experience in meditation. Swearer (1973a: 18) speaks of *dhammas* as being not only mental objects but also "truths." I will have more to say about this issue below that will have much in common with Swearer's and Anālayo's positions. Also, Cox (1992: 74) speaks of the "ever more inclusive explanations offered" for this term in Abhidharma texts.

examination of the present contents of experience.[16] Some go so far as to construe "mindfulness" as an exceptionally clear and concentrated attention to "the bare object of perception."[17] This indeed is the sense in which the distinct meanings of *sati* – "memory" and "mindfulness" – appear to be in deepest conflict. When one is carefully aware of the present contents of experience, supposedly in a non-conceptual and non-categorical manner, he or she must be markedly suspicious of any trace of "memory."[18]

How can the same word mean both "memory" and "mindfulness"? This problem will be shown to result from an initial misunderstanding of the terms; when "mindfulness" means "bare awareness," mindfulness and memory are nearly antithetical. But when, on the other hand, mindfulness is understood as structured awareness, as a form of attention that can be directed and worked upon, and thus as an implementation of Buddhist "memory," the terms end up representing different aspects of the same notion of consciousness. The s*ati* of the SPS conforms to the second, and in no way to the first, of these definitions. It involves an intense, embodied, and concrete vision of the philosophical truths of impermanence, pain, and non-selfhood. This is anything but naked attention and is more concerned with seeing things as they are defined by Buddhist thought than with seeing them "as they really are." At the same time, it is important to realize that we are not speaking of a theoretical contemplation but of a spontaneous and sincere encounter with the realities of impermanence and dissatisfaction. When such a sustained and focused perception of Buddhist truth becomes stable, the mind is in a state in which realization may take place. This is an awareness that must be cultivated through continuous and diligent reflection on Buddhist truth, and the heart of the SPS delineates the effort to bring such awareness into being.

A number of scholars have commented on the interrelated meaning of memory and mindfulness with regard to *sati* in the SPS. Paul Griffiths

[16] Cox (1992a: 67–78) distinguishes between two meanings of *sati* – as a psychological function and as a meditative technique. *Sati* can also be interpreted in other ways, and later Buddhist meditative traditions gave it technical meanings concerned with processes of attention at work in meditative concentration. See for example in Griffiths (1992: 110–16). Gethin (2011: 263–65) provides a short history of the translations of this term and the final adoption of "mindfulness." For further discussion of the early meanings of the Sanskrit *smṛti*, see Klaus (1992) as well as Brick (2006).

[17] For example, Nyanaponika Thera (1962: 30–32) believes *satipaṭṭhāna* to be a process of "bare attention," which "consists in a bare and exact registering of the object." Such a notion of *sati* is implied by the Buddha's treatment of *satipaṭṭhāna* in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-saṃyutta* at SN V.142, 144. See also Swearer (2007: 267). See Gethin (2011: 266–67) for a critical discussion of this notion.

[18] Anālayo (2003: ch. 3, esp. 46–49) sees *sati* in the SPS as distinct from the meaning of "memory."

(1981: 614), for instance, has spoken of mindfulness as "an extremely effective way of training the awareness to perceive the universe in accordance with the categories of the Abhidhamma" and of insight meditation as a process by which "sensation, cognition and intellection are ... imbued with wisdom." Crangle (1994: 260) has also discussed the way that the exercises of *satipaṭṭhāna* participate in a process that "install(s) the Buddhist metaphysic (i.e., the characteristics of existence etc.) firmly in the *jhāyin*'s consciousness." More recently, Gethin (2011) has highlighted the centrality of remembering and recollection to the early definitions of "mindfulness."[19] Here we build upon these insights and attempt to define the precise role of *sati* in the early Buddhist path to liberation. In analyzing the meditations outlined by SPS, we will thus ask ourselves what kind of "remembering" takes place when mindfulness is "established" and what this teaches us about the relationship between philosophy and meditation.

Let us move into the text itself. The first six meditations recorded in the SPS[20] involve the observation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), beginning with the *ānāpāna* meditation, which focuses on the breath:

> Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he understands "I breathe in long"; or breathing out long, he understands "I breathe out long"; breathing in short, he understands "I breathe in short"; or breathing out short, he understands "I breathe out short." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in tranquilizing the body formations"; he trains thus: "I shall breathe out tranquilizing the body formations."[21]

[19] See also Gyatso (1992: 6, 13–15); Cox (1992a: 67–68); and Gethin (2001 [1992]: 36–44).

[20] Traditionally, the last set of meditations (the "nine charnel ground" meditations [*navasīvathikā*]) is counted as nine meditations, and hence fourteen meditations of the body are listed (see, for example, Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi [1995: 1190, n.139]).

[21] Translation from Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 145–46). MN I.56: *Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araññagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujuṃ kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā. So satova assasati satova passasati. Dīghaṃ vā assasanto 'dīghaṃ assasāmī'ti pajānāti, dīghaṃ vā passasanto 'dīghaṃ passasāmī'ti pajānāti; rassaṃ vā assasanto 'rassaṃ assasāmī'ti pajānāti, rassaṃ vā passasanto 'rassaṃ passasāmī'ti pajānāti; 'sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati, 'sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati; 'passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī'ti sikkhati, 'passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmī'ti sikkhati.*

At MN III.94 and AN I.43–46, "mindfulness intent on the body" (*kāyagatāsati*) is said to be the "one thing" (*ekadhammo*) that will bring about all states necessary for attaining liberation. But see Gethin (2001 [1992]: 57), who believes this statement to be true only in the sense that it will naturally activate the other *satipatthānas*. See also Cox (1993: 69).

Aside from the fact that this meditation is clearly concerned with a conscious monitoring of breathing, it is difficult to determine the precise nature of the meditation. Evidently, *ānāpāna* demands an intense awareness of what happens in the body and, most significant, of the process of breathing itself. This is an important point to note: *ānāpāna* meditation obviously involves a substantial degree of "mindfulness." At the same time, it is not completely obvious whether it contains conceptual elements. For instance, when one "understands (*pajānāti*; possibly better, "knows") 'I breathe in long,'" it is difficult to discern whether he knows this fact conceptually or, rather, whether he is simply aware of the long in-breath he is taking.[22] In any case, a principle of grace is in order regarding our appraisal of this meditation, which may be considered an application of forceful meditative concentration on breathing and its functioning in the body. The same is true regarding the next two meditations listed by the sutta. In the next meditation, the practitioner "understands accordingly however his body is disposed" –specifically, when he is walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.[23] In the following meditation, he "acts in full awareness" (*sampajānakārī hoti*) with regard to a long list of bodily actions, such as where he is going and directing his gaze, when he is eating or drinking, and when he is disposing of urine or feces.

Following the description of each of the meditations described by the SPS, there appears a refrain that characterizes the quality of the meditative vision involved. This standardized passage seems naturally connected to the three meditations just outlined, which surely involve a true quality of focused attention on present bodily processes:

> Thus he abides in the body, deeply observing (*anupassī*) the body inwardly. He abides in the body, deeply observing the body outwardly. He abides in

[22] The ĀSS elaborates on the practice of "mindfulness of breathing." It adds to the instructions presented by the SPS a number of observations to be carried out while one is breathing in or breathing out. For example, the meditator should breathe in and out "while experiencing rapture" (*pīti-paṭisaṃvedī*) or "pleasure" (*sukha-paṭisaṃvedī*). Next, the meditator will breathe in and out "experiencing the mind" (*citta-paṭisaṃvedī*), "gladdening the mind" (*abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ*), "concentrating the mind" (*samādahaṃ cittam*), and "liberating the mind" (*vimocayaṃ cittaṃ*). Interestingly, the final set of instructions involves components that seem to demand at least some level of conceptual understanding: the meditator is guided to breathe in and out while "observing impermanence" (*aniccānupassī*) and, further, observing "dispassion" (*virāga*; in Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi [1995: 944]), "cessation" (*nirodha*), and "relinquishment" (*paṭinissagga*) (MN III.180). Or, otherwise, these may be examples of non-conceptual monitoring of experience that reveal an attempt to view experience in a certain way.

[23] MN I.57: *Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu gacchanto vā 'gacchāmī'ti pajānāti, ṭhito vā 'ṭhitomhī'ti pajānāti, nisinno vā 'nisinnomhī'ti pajānāti, sayāno vā 'sayānomhī'ti pajānāti. Yathā yathā vā panassa kāyo paṇihito hoti tathā tathā naṃ pajānāti.*

> the body, deeply observing the body inwardly and outwardly. He abides in the body deeply observing the events (*dhammā*) that arise. He abides in the body deeply observing the events that cease. He abides in the body deeply observing the events that arise and cease. Or the mindfulness "there is a body" is established for him, in the right extent of knowledge, in the right extent of awareness (*paṭissati*). And he abides unsupported and depends on nothing in the world. That, monks, is how a monk abides in the body deeply observing the body.[24]

This passage, too, poses many questions. Particularly vague is the statement that the meditator is "deeply observing the body inwardly" and/or "outwardly."[25] It is also not evident what is meant by the observation of all *dhammas* that pass in the body as they arise and cease. *Dhammas* in this sense could be minute details of bodily processes, such as minuscule movements of the diaphragm, or they could be more general objects, such as the course of breathing as a whole. In any case, it is clear that this stock passage recurs after each and every meditation in order to enhance the notion of "mindfulness" as a focused application of attention and that this is obviously a central element of mindfulness according to the authors of this text. The passage strengthens the idea that the meditative space developed by these practices involves a careful and vigilant alertness to corporeal reality (or to mental reality in later meditations) at any specific moment, creating an intense state of awareness and presence.

The role of the refrain as an expression of plain, concentrated monitoring is less obvious, however, with regard to the next meditation narrated by the sutta:

> And also, monks, the monk considers this very body, from the soles of his feet upward, from the crown of his head and downward, and to the edge of his skin, as full of many sorts of uncleanliness: in this body the hairs of the head, bodily hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, blood, sweat, fat, tears, saliva, snot, cartilage, urine.[26]

[24] MN I.56: *Iti ajjhattaṃ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati; samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati vayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati samudayavayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmiṃ viharati. 'Atthi kāyo'ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti yāvad eva ñāṇamattāya paṭissatimattāya anissito ca viharati na ca kiñci loke upādiyati. Evampi kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati.*

[25] Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi, as well as Anālayo, translate this as "internally and externally" (1995: 146); Gethin renders it as "within and without" (2001 [1992]: 53–54). My translation follows Cox (1992a: 71). See also Kuan (2008: 117–19), who follows the *Vibhaṅga*, which sees these terms as referring to one's own body and to the body of other people, respectively.

[26] MN I.57: *Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā adho kesamatthakā, tacapariyantaṃ pūraṃ nānappakārassa asucino paccavekkhati – 'atthi imasmiṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā*

Here, a faithful reading must ask: must the body necessarily be seen "as full of many sorts of uncleanliness"? Is this the only truthful way to look at the body? Could not the body be seen as a form of beauty, its workings awe-inspiring and amazing? Does not our spleen, for instance, produce a sense of true aesthetic wonder and inspiration? The answer supplied by the authors of the SPS to this set of questions is resolute: the body is ugly and dirty. There is a very specific way in which the body is best viewed, particularly on the path to *nibbāna* – as disgusting. Seeing the body as unclean may not be an end in itself since such a view is probably intended to produce a realization of the body's impermanent and pain-causing nature. Nonetheless, this vision of the body is strikingly negative, and the realizations this stance will generate rely on a particular and idiosyncratic notion of truth.

Even if we grant that the body *is* unclean, we must ask if the consideration of the body as unclean or impure is rightfully described as an instance of "mindfulness." In essence, "seeing as" is far removed from a neutral, unbiased "mindfulness." Rather, "seeing as" is more connected with an implementation of memory: one sees according to an understanding developed in the past. This practice suggests that we are involved in more than a careful monitoring of experience – indeed, this appears as a shaping of vision so that it will correspond to the contents of a specific Buddhist understanding. The refrain follows this meditation too, so that we are reminded that this understanding is supposed to be part of the concrete, unelaborate examination of bodily processes.

The reflection on the body parts is particularly important for understanding the logic of *satipaṭṭhāna* since it is the only meditation that appears in all versions of the SPS. According to Anālayo, it "remains as the unanimously accepted core of the contemplation of the body in all the different versions."[27] The conceptual manipulation at work intensifies, however, with the next meditation: "Again, monks, a monk reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.'"[28] This meditation no doubt requires an

dantā taco maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhimiñjaṃ vakkaṃ hadayaṃ yakanaṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ antaṃ antaguṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā muttan'ti.

27 Anālayo (2003: 121).

28 Translation from Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 148). MN I.57: *Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ yathāṭhitaṃ yathāpaṇihitaṃ dhātuso paccavekkhati – 'atthi imasmiṃ kāye pathavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū'ti.*

application of conceptual analysis; it seems highly unlikely that anyone can consider his or her body "as consisting of elements" without applying a conscious conceptual and verbal effort.[29] Here categories, which are part of a mature philosophical vision, are used in order to observe the body. Specifically, seeing the body as composed of the great elements appears to have little to do with a spontaneous occurrence of *bare* attention. Rather, the mindfulness that is being developed is supposed to come to terms with the apparent fact that the body is no more than a mass of neutral matter, which, if we pick up the subtext, one is best not to regard as one's own. While such perceptions probably occur spontaneously to someone who has cultivated detachment, it is naive to believe that this type of "mindfulness" has a privileged access to "things as they are."

The conceptual, even biased, nature of the meditation on the elements is highlighted by the image given as an example for correct implementation of the meditative observation:

> Just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice who had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a monk reviews this same body . . . as consisting of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."[30]

The example sets the emotional tone of the meditation: the butcher suppressed all care for the animal; it is a dead piece of meat. In a similar way, the meditator should deny any affection he has for his body. Like the parts of the body in the previous meditation, the value of the body is reduced to its material significance, which should be treated, emotionally, as a butcher treats the cow he mutilates. Affection is to be crushed; it would not allow one to experience the truths of impermanence and pain.

It may be argued that the goal of this meditation is not to make a statement regarding the body's lack of value but to lead the practitioner to adopt an indifferent and disenchanted approach toward his or her body; this meditation can be conceived as a practice that is only aimed to counter attachment. This claim may be true to some extent, but it nonetheless

[29] Anālayo (personal communication) suggests that the conceptual element of this meditation should not be emphasized too strongly. He relies on the traditional presentation of this meditation as a reflection on the aspects of hardness, softness, warmth, and motion in the body. Anālayo acknowledges that this approach has little support in the original text, but one can easily see how this understanding developed. In any case, even if this is the intention of the text, the body is meant to be observed in accord with a distinct conceptual pattern.

[30] MN I.58: *Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, dakkho goghātako vā goghātakantevāsī vā gāviṃ vadhitvā catumahāpathe bilaso vibhajitvā nisinno assa. Evam eva kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ yathāṭhitaṃ yathāpaṇihitaṃ dhātuso paccavekkhati –'atthi imasmiṃ kāye pathavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū'ti.*

must be taken with a grain of salt. This meditation is not only fighting attachment but also creating detachment, which possesses obvious emotional content and that is based on a well-developed philosophical stance. Certain views are sanctioned as valuable contributions to the states of mind the meditations target while other positions are rejected. The example of the butcher hints that the practitioner is doing much more than neutrally scrutinizing his body according to the conceptual scheme of the four elements. Rather, he is internalizing a philosophical position with a specific idea of what corporeal existence is about.

This understanding becomes clearer in the next, final meditation directed at the body, which by far exceeds anything we have seen thus far:

> And also, monks, just as if a monk would see a body left in a charnel ground, dead for one, two, or three days, bloated, discolored, and rotting, the monk compares his own body with it: "This body, too, is of precisely the same nature, of precisely the same existence, of precisely the same future."[31]

The text continues to enumerate eight more such "charnel ground" (*sīvathikā*) meditations, the disgust intensifying as we proceed. No details are spared as the meditator imagines corpses being eaten by jackals and worms and bones decomposing at different stages of decay – with or without sinews, covered with blood or not, amassed in a pile or scattered about, and so forth. Again, we are patently not dealing here with anything that has to do with our immediate intuitions about "mindfulness." Rather, this meditation is a creative act of the imagination, a direction of the mind toward a conceptual contemplation of one's body and of existence in general, accompanied by powerful feelings of horror and disgust. It should be unambiguously clear that we are not dealing with a simple perceptual monitoring of the "here and now" but with an adoption of an ideological and emotional choice with regard to being. "Mind" is indeed being "filled" with more than naked objects.

I must emphasize that I am in no way denying that the engaged meditator who diligently implements the instructions outlined in the SPS undergoes a deep transformative experience. On the contrary, I believe he would. What I am saying is that the transformation the monk will experience is not best described only as affording him a more intimate access to his present contents of consciousness. Rather, the transformation is better understood as a conditioning of vision, as a structuring of

[31] MN I.58 *Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu seyyathāpi passeyya sarīraṃ sivathikāya chaḍḍitaṃ ekāhamataṃ vā dvīhamataṃ vā tīhamataṃ vā uddhumātakaṃ vinīlakaṃ vipubbakajātaṃ. So imam eva kāyaṃ upasaṃharati – 'ayampi kho kāyo evaṃdhammo evaṃbhāvī evaṃanatīto'ti.*

awareness, intended to produce a particular way of generating experience. This new vision is profoundly in tune with the basic Buddhist understanding of reality as impermanent, suffering, and not-the-self, and the body is meant to be seen as disgusting, insignificant, and potentially threatening.

We may now conceptualize the SPS's statement regarding the body as a whole. The "establishing of mindfulness with regard to the body" appears, first of all, to involve a powerful meditative concentration. One develops the ability to take note of all events that pass in the body. In this sense, he or she could be said to be practicing "mindfulness" in the way this term is commonly and pre-theoretically employed. At the same time, the meditator establishing *sati* is attempting, with sustained effort, to condition this same "mindfulness" according to the way the Buddha conceptualized – that is "remembered" or "constructed" – the path to and experience of awakening. When we integrate these two vectors we realize that the establishing of *sati* is best described as a unique structuring of awareness – or, more precisely, as an imbuing of consciousness with memory; this is, in fact *sati* – mindfulness *and* memory, or maybe mindfulness *of memory*. Although the practice may relieve one's vision of its predetermined tendencies, the practitioner is also advised to replace one conditioning with another, with a conditioning that the Buddha deemed more conducive to *nibbāna*.

The nature of the relationship between "mindfulness" and "memory" becomes clearer when we examine the remaining meditations taught by the Buddha in the SPS. The next two meditations are dedicated to the observations of feelings (*vedanā*) and of the mind (*citta*). Here, as with the first three meditations on the body, the practice can at least be thought to correspond to an unstructured application of intense attention. One is aware of all bodily (*sāmisa*) and mental (*nirāmisa*) sensations, be they of joy (*sukha*), of pain (*dukkha*), or neutral (*adukkham-asukham*). Next, one understands one's states of mind. For example, the meditator is aware of his mind being with or without the afflictions of passion (*rāga*), aggression (*dosa*), and confusion (*moha*). We could again wonder about the relationship between these two meditations and different Buddhist conceptual schemas; it is not fully evident whether these meditations imply an awareness that exceeds the pre-conceptual registration of one's sensations and mental processes. Nonetheless, we need not exaggerate the role conceptualization plays in the observation of feelings and the mind. It should be clear that even if while practicing these

meditations one is conceptually defining the contents of his vision, he is doing so while being deeply in tune with what passes in his experience. At the same time, it does appear that this focused vision on present mental events is interested in the way these same events are viewed according to Buddhist philosophy and its preferred categories of observation. One is to use such schemes of analysis in order to fortify his capacity for direct observation.

The situation again becomes more complex when we analyze the final set of meditations directed at *dhammas*, the first of which concerns the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*):

> Here, a monk abides contemplating mind objects as mind objects in terms of the five hindrances . . . here, there being sensual desire in him, a monk understands: "There is sensual desire in me"; or there being no sensual desire in him, he understands: "There is no sensual desire in me"; and he also understands how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non arising of abandoned sensual desire.[32]

The same formula is then applied to the remaining four hindrances of ill will (*byāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*). Again, it cannot be determined whether conceptual processes are necessarily at play in this meditation. Possibly, this passage only utilizes conceptual elements in order to relate what originally occurred in a non-conceptual way. At the same time, if this is true, it must at the very least be conceded that one would have had to be well-acquainted with the concepts of the five hindrances in order to learn to see them immediately and non-conceptually. This is probably true of the previous two meditations on feelings and the mind as well: in order to practice these meditations without the use of active conceptual analysis, one must have meticulously gone through this same conceptual analysis many times before. Once this principle is appreciated – that one must learn to analyze one's experience in terms of Buddhist categories in order to see them spontaneously in a non-conceptual

[32] Translation from Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 151). MN I.60: *Kathañ ca, bhikkhave, bhikkhu dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati pañcasu nīvaraṇesu . . . Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu santaṃ vā ajjhattaṃ kāmacchandaṃ 'atthi me ajjhattaṃ kāmacchando'ti pajānāti, asantaṃ vā ajjhattaṃ kāmacchandaṃ 'natthi me ajjhattaṃ kāmacchando'ti pajānāti; yathā ca anuppannassa kāmacchandassa uppādo hoti tañ ca pajānāti, yathā ca uppannassa kāmacchandassa pahānaṃ hoti tañ ca pajānāti, yathā ca pahīnassa kāmacchandassa āyatiṃ anuppādo hoti tañ ca pajānāti.*

manner – we are well on the way to bridging the ostensible gap between mindfulness and memory in the SPS.

In the following meditation, the meditator is instructed to review the five aggregates, regarding each one as "'form' (or one of the remaining aggregates); 'appearance of form'; 'disappearance of form.'"[33] Clearly, such a practice is tailored to the Buddhist view of the reality, centering on the impermanent, insubstantial, and decaying nature of the aggregates. When a person with no familiarity with Buddhist teachings sits down to meditate, he surely does not see – or, at least, is not aware of seeing – "the arising and passing away of the aggregates." Once he has become acquainted with Buddhist doctrine, he may indeed view his experience in terms of the concepts he has come to know and see. At that time, he may also agree that even prior to his acquaintance with Buddhist doctrine he was seeing the five aggregates but that he did not yet possess the ability to identify them.

This vision of the aggregates offers a penetrating insight into the mechanics of *satipaṭṭhāna*: one is conditioned not only to view reality along the lines of the Buddhist understanding of reality but also to reproduce specific and highly structured meditative experiences. Not only does the practitioner analyze his meditative experience in accord with Buddhist schemes of analysis, she sees them in a pre-determined, well-defined way that is shaped in every detail – she is to observe precisely how the aggregates come in and out of existence.

We can utilize the next meditation, which deals with "the six external and internal (sense) spheres" (*chasu ajjhātika-bāhiresu āyatanesu*), to define our reading of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation on *dhammas*. This is how the meditator is instructed to view the first base of the eye and its forms, the same formula being repeated for each of the five succeeding spheres (the senses and their objects):

[33] MN I.61: *Iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo.*" Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 152) translate this as: "Such is material form, such its origin, such its disappearance." For the rendering of the *iti* I employ, see note 11 to Chapter 2 above. Note that Anālayo (2009: 94) says that "Since this contemplation occurs only in the Pāli discourses and is absent from all parallel versions, as well as from the *Vibhaṅga*, mindfulness directed to the impermanent nature of the five aggregates would be an evident choice for exclusion from what should be considered as the original version of contemplation of dharmas." Nevertheless, following a short discussion, Anālayo concludes: "Thus the contemplation of the five aggregates appears to be recognized in the thought world of the early discourses as a particularly powerful implementation of *satipaṭṭhāna* as a direct path to realization, even though from a comparative perspective it would appear to be a later addition to the instructions given in the discourses explicitly dedicated to this theme" (p. 95). Notice that these remarks imply that the "original version" of the SPS, although probably different from what we have before us today, is also probably not very different in spirit.

> Here, a monk understands the eye, he understands forms, he understands the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the un arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the future non arising of the abandoned fetter.[34]

Plainly, this meditation involves a considerable degree of both "mindfulness" and "memory": the meditator is intensely engaged in the observation of current mental events while being aided by a complex conceptual map to guide his observation. Although he is attentive to the contents of his observation, he is not passively observing what appears in the mind; rather, he actively structures what he sees so that it will accord with Buddhist categories and teachings. Note the particular significance of knowing "the future non-arising of the abandoned fetter," a "mental object" that is by definition inaccessible to direct, non-ideational perception. As with the other parts of the formula of the six sense spheres, we can envision the meditator seeing or sensing – that is, being "mindful" of – this significant event. But this is not a simple perception of the natural happenings in the mind. With this perception, we must acknowledge that the practitioner is not a disinterested observer but, rather, one who creates and structures his vision as he meditates; he is carefully witnessing the "objects of mind" while meticulously keeping in mind what it is that he is supposed to keep track of. In fact, we could say that he is "remembering" the contents of his present experience or seeing them in terms of internalized Buddhist knowledge.[35]

It seems that the *dhammā* that are monitored by the meditator possess a dual character: they are not only "mental objects," but at the same time they are also "truths," or even "doctrines." It is here that we grasp a central point – the conceptual elements of the meditation are not differentiated in any way from the mental objects which they characterize; the object and the conceptual, doctrinal element are one and the same. The practitioner is not observing naked events but is rather *seeing mental objects as specific instantiations of the Buddhist categorization of experience*; She is continuously attentive to the Buddhist theoretical enterprise.

[34] Translation from Ñāṇamoḷi and Bodhi (1995: 152). MN I.61: *Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu cakkhuñ ca pajānāti, rūpe ca pajānāti, yañ ca tadubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati saṃyojanaṃ tañ ca pajānāti, yathā ca anuppannassa saṃyojanassa uppādo hoti tañ ca pajānāti, yathā ca uppannassa saṃyojanassa pahānaṃ hoti tañ ca pajānāti, yathā ca pahīnassa saṃyojanassa āyatiṃ anuppādo hoti tañ ca pajānāti.*

[35] Notice, that although the meditation on the six bases is not part of the Chinese version of the SPS (Anālayo [2011]: 90), the same type of statement regarding "the future non-arising of the abandoned fetter" is represented in the earlier meditation on the five hindrances, which does appear in the Chinese versions.

It must be emphasized that in speaking of mindfulness as a form of active Buddhist memory, I am intending a specific sense of the term that in some ways is divorced from our immediate intuitions regarding memory. Pre-reflectively, memory involves a present recollection of a past event; one brings to mind a mental image that was acquired in the past and, possibly, further developed in the mind, again in the past. In the context of the SPS, I am speaking of a precisely opposite direction in which memory functions. Rather than memory proceeding from the present to the past, it proceeds from the past to the present. It is "memory" in the sense that past experiences and insights inform the present contents of consciousness. Memory here involves the conditioning of present experience by internalized structures of knowledge, the origin of which is temporally previous to the conscious events it is structuring. Rather than "re-collection," we may speak of "pre-collection."[36]

We may suggest that with good practice, the "ardent, attentive and mindful" (*ātāpī sampajāno satimā*) meditator probably improves his ability to unite mindfulness and memory. With regard to the novice, we may be right to designate two parallel processes at work: at times he is aware, to the extent of his capacity, of the spontaneous occurrences in his mind. At other times, he analyzes these same occurrences according to the teachings he has received.[37] With practice, these two distinct mental processes probably become one – in order to be "mindful," the adept no longer needs to "remember," that is, to actively reflect on his present experience with the aid of truths and concepts he has learned in the past.[38] Rather, he naturally gains the ability to see according to these concepts; he "understands" or "knows" (*pajānāti*) his experience according to the method of analysis

[36] See Malamoud (1989: ch. 15) and Shulman (2001: ch. 8) who both discuss Indian notions of memory in a manner that has deep connection to the analysis of the SPS conducted here. Malamoud centers on an analysis of the term *smara*, which refers not only to memory but to notions of *kāma* (love, desire, and passion) as well. Malamoud thus speaks of the structural relationship between love and memory in the context of Indian thought: one remembers what one loves; we contain our love in our memory, and thus memory is determined by love. Malamoud defines "se rappeler" (to remember) as "fixer avec intensité son esprit sur un objet (qui n'est pas matériellement présent)" (to fix one's spirit with intensity on an object [that is not materially present]) (297). Memory proves to be a pre-existent model of perception, structured by desire, which further supports the functioning of desire itself (298).

Deep questions arise regarding Malamoud's analysis of memory – a little too deep, in fact. It seems possible that the Buddha may have been seeking not to uproot desire but to structure it. Shulman, too, in the context of a discussion of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñāna-śākuntala*, speaks of memory as "a prospective form of knowledge," having forward rather than backward movement (192) and as an "epistemic movement in the present" (208).

[37] See Gethin (2001 [1992]: 53). [38] See Swearer (1973a: 18).

he has internalized. Philosophy has by now become perception, and can be seen as the foundation for the structure of experience.

The understanding of *sati* as a form of "memory" that structures consciousness, awareness, or vision becomes especially relevant when we look at the final two meditations presented by the SPS. In the penultimate meditation, the Buddha's student will notice the arising of the seven enlightenment factors (*bojjhaṅgā*).[39] In the last meditation he will realize (*yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*: literally, he "knows as it actually is") the 4NTs.[40] Given the analysis of the SPS conducted above, it appears that in many ways this realization of the 4NTs occurs once one has managed to fully structure one's perception according to the Buddhist view of reality. With no gap between her mindfulness and her Buddhist memory, the ardent meditator may in fact be able to "truly" see the workings of this teaching alive in her own mind. She will directly, possibly even non-conceptually, "know as it is": "This is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the end of suffering, this is the path leading to the end of suffering."[41]

3.2 On the relationship between the practice of mindfulness and *jhāna*-meditation

We have seen that the seminal SPS depicts mindfulness as an active and attentive Buddhist memory, an awareness that has become fully habituated to the Buddhist philosophical view of reality. This awareness, once it is fully developed, spontaneously perceives any event as unsatisfying, a perception that is grounded in an emotional and cognitive stance of detachment. We once again encounter the inherently practical nature of early Buddhist thought: this is a philosophy that is meant to be lived, which analyses subjectivity in order to transform it in a way that is meaningful to the person who engages with the philosophy.

39 In the ĀSS it is suggested that the seven "enlightenment factors" arise once the four *satipaṭṭhānā* have been fully developed (MN III.85). Thus, in the SPS, the seven *bojjhaṅgā* are part of the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* while in the ĀSS they result from the development of the latter. There are other notable differences between this sutta's conception of the four *satipaṭṭhānā* and the one of the SPS.

40 The 4NTs are absent from the Chinese versions of the SPS; see Anālayo (2011: 90). Although the meditation on the 4NTs may be a later inclusion in the Pāli version, the seven factors of awakening appear to be part of the original core of the text. On this, Anālayo (2011: 93) says: "In evaluating the presentation of the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* in the Pāli and Chinese discourse versions, the agreement among the different versions highlights the importance of overcoming the hindrances and developing the factors of awakening as central topics of contemplation of dharmas."

41 MN I.62: *Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti.*

In this section, I wish to point to the close relationship between the early practice of mindfulness and the practice of *jhāna*. As we saw in the first chapter, the central theory of enlightenment in the Nikāyas speaks of an awakening to three forms of knowledge that occurs in the fourth *jhāna*. Mindfulness is an important aspect in the description of the entrance into and abiding in *jhāna*; it is explicitly said to be a characteristic of both the third and the fourth *jhānas*. Although we may raise the question whether the notion of *sati* that is employed in the Buddha's "autobiographical" account of his enlightenment and the *sati* of the SPS are equal, there is good reason to connect the two.

First, on theoretical grounds, we should notice that the notion of *sati* discussed in this chapter corresponds to the general understanding of consciousness held by the early Buddhists. Consciousness was not seen as purity devoid of content but as a structured and conditioned element of experience.[42] As one of the five aggregates, consciousness is considered as changing, non-unitary, and inherently intentional. Thus the entrance into *jhāna* need not be considered only as an emptying of awareness of its contents. Indeed, we would expect *samādhi* to include some conceptual, or at least structured, elements. *Sati*, as the active and attentive instantiation of Buddhist wisdom, should participate, indeed should be an active ingredient, in *samādhi* experience.

Luckily, we need not rely too heavily on such theoretical considerations since there is much textual evidence to support the connection between *sati* and *jhāna*. Here, it would be helpful to begin with an insight regarding the structure of the Buddhist path, which was first brought to my mind by Tilmann Vetter's *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*. Vetter's main contribution involves an interpretation of the eightfold noble path as a gradual process that leads toward "correct *samādhi*", that is to the four *jhānas*. According to this view, the eight elements of the path are not meant to be practiced simultaneously but represent a

[42] Johansson (1979: ch. 4); Oldenzki (2011: 57ff.). The inherently conditioned nature of consciousness is the main point made by the Buddha in the well-known *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya-sutta* ("The great discourse on the destruction of craving," MN 38, I.256–71). In this text, the Buddha admonishes a monk named Sāti who understands the Buddha's teachings to imply that the same consciousness moves over different lives in *saṃsāra*. The Buddha confronts Sāti by saying: "To whom, fool, have you known me to have taught the dharma in this way? Have I not explained through many teachings that consciousness is dependently-originated and that unless conditions are present there is no arising of consciousness?" ('*Kassa nu kho nāma tvaṃ, moghapurisa, mayā evaṃ dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāsi? Nanu mayā, moghapurisa, anekapariyāyena paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ vuttaṃ, aññatra paccayā natthi viññāṇassa sambhavo'ti*?).

sequence.[43] Vetter's main argument relies on a correspondence he identifies between the eight elements of the fourth noble truth and the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*'s (SPhS) paradigmatic outline of the Buddhist path.[44] In this text, the Buddha describes the path as a set sequence in which someone identifies the truth of the Buddha's teachings ("right view"), goes forth and becomes a monk ("right intention"), perfects his morality ("right speech, action and livelihood"), enters meditation by guarding the activity of his senses ("right effort"), practices mindfulness ("right mindfulness"), and finally attains the four *jhānas* ("right concentration"). According to this gradual approach to the Buddhist path, *sati* is the final element that matures *before* entering *jhāna* meditation and achieving realization.[45]

Although Vetter's work has received some criticism,[46] the overall scheme he presents is highly compelling. From our perspective, the problem with this formulation would be that it does not do full justice to the picture of the Buddhist path as it is portrayed by the SPhS itself. According to this text, as shown by Gethin (2001), it is the many forms of knowledge and diverse attainments that arise in the fourth *jhāna* that are said to be the most meaningful "fruits of recluseship" (*sāmaññaphala*).[47] The eightfold noble path thus does not proceed far enough in order to include the arising of knowledge in, or following, *jhāna*. Presumably due to his view regarding the fundamental incompatibility of *jhāna* and knowledge,[48] Vetter prefers to read the SPhS up to the point where it speaks of the knowledge that arises in *jhāna*, seeing the inclusion of knowledge in the account as an interpolation. A more attractive explanation, which would preserve the view of the eightfold path as a sequence but would not have to take the

43 See also Sujato (2006: 111), who makes a similar point regarding the structure of the path according to the DCP.

44 "The discourse on the fruits of recluseship," DN 2 (I.47–86).

45 It should be noted that the passage used by the SPhS in order to express the notion of mindfulness is the mindfulness of bodily postures, the third meditation of the SPS, which does not necessarily conform to the picture of mindfulness developed in this chapter. This passage may be seen as a stock phrase that is meant to serve as a token for the wider and more complex practice of "the establishment of mindfulness." This suggestion is supported by the placing of this meditation as the first *satipaṭṭhāna* excercise in the Chinese *Madhyama-āgama* version of the SPS.

46 See Collins's (1991) and Bronkhorst's (1993b) highly critical reviews of Vetter's book. These authors may be correct in highlighting the difficulty in taking Vetter's views as historical truths. It is nevertheless striking that such leading scholars fail to critically engage with Vetter's basic approach to the structure of the early Buddhist path to liberation.

47 Gethin (2001 [1992]: 207–12) shows that the sequence of development related by the SPhS is from *sīla* to *samādhi* to *paññā*. The fact that the basic scheme of *sīla-samādhi-paññā* of the SPhS is replaced by the sequence *paññā-sīla-samādhi* in the noble eightfold path, attests, according to Gethin, that the eight elements are not to be seen as a gradual process but are meant to be practiced simultaneously.

48 See page 10 in Chapter 1.

description of knowledge as alien would be that the knowledge that arises in the fourth *jhāna* is considered an integral element of *jhānic* experience.[49] Alternatively, the eightfold path can be taken as a map of the stages that lead to liberation but which does not include liberation itself.

The understanding of the eightfold noble path as a progress toward "correct *samādhi*" can obviously not be exhaustive; there is surely a complementary meaning according to which the eight elements represent the Buddhist approach to life, which is to be cultivated, as best as possible, simultaneously at all times. Nevertheless, the picture Vetter portrays conforms to the strong emphasis on *samādhi* in the early scriptures and is supported by numerous texts. Thus, for example, the opening discourse of the *Magga-saṃyutta*, an important anthology on *magga*, the Buddhist path, states:

> Here, monks, knowledge (*vijjā*) is the forerunner of the attainment of all skillful (*kusala*) qualities (*dhamma*), followed by conscience (*hirottappa*). For a wise person who has attained knowledge, right view arises. For one who has right view, right intention arises. For one who has right intention, right speech arises. For one who has right speech, right action arises. For one who has right action, right livelihood arises. For one who has right livelihood, right effort arises. For one who has right effort, right mindfulness arises. For one who has right mindfulness, right concentration arises.[50]

Here the eightfold path is clearly seen as a series in which one element leads to the other until the goal of "correct *samādhi*" is attained. Specifically, one who has perfected *sati* is able to achieve *jhāna*. Note the interesting variation on this theme in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*[51] of the MN:

> Here, monks, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? For one who has right view, monks, right intention arises. For one who has right intention, right speech arises. For one who has right speech, right action arises. For one who has right action, right livelihood arises. For one who has right livelihood, right effort arises. For one who has right effort, right mindfulness arises. For one who has right mindfulness, right concentration arises. For one who has right concentration, right knowledge (*ñāṇa*) arises. For one who has right knowledge, right

[49] See also Gethin (2001 [1992]: 345).

[50] SN V.1: *Vijjā ca kho, bhikkhave, pubbaṅgamā kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ samāpattiyā, anvad eva hirottappaṃ. Vijjāgatassa, bhikkhave, viddasuno sammādiṭṭhi pahoti; sammādiṭṭhissa sammāsaṅkappo pahoti; sammāsaṅkappassa sammāvācā pahoti; sammāvācassa sammākammanto pahoti; sammākammantassa sammājīvo pahoti; sammāājīvassa sammāvāyāmo pahoti; sammāvāyāmassa sammāsati pahoti; sammāsatissa sammāsamādhi pahotīti.*

[51] "The discourse on the great forty," MN 177, III.71–78.

> liberation (*vimutti*) arises. Therefore, monks, the trainee[52] is endowed with eight limbs; the arhat is endowed with ten limbs.[53]

The eight elements of the path turn into ten through the Arahant's attainment of knowledge and liberation. Here the path is said to be coursed sequentially, its fruition being equal to the appearance of knowledge and liberation for one who has perfected the eight elements of the path, whose acme is correct *samādhi*. This passage also supports the understanding that liberating knowledge is considered external to the path itself and is regarded as its fruition experienced by the Arahant.

We receive substantial support for the view that *sati* is conducive to *jhāna* also from the texts devoted to the presentation of mindfulness. First, the Chinese versions of the SPS both include the four *jhānas* as part of the meditations they recommend. The *Madhyama-āgama* version includes the *jhānas* in the section on "mindfulness of the body," while the *Ekottara-āgama* places them in the section on *dhammas*.[54] Yet more interesting is Gethin's demonstration of the essential connection between the development of the seven "factors of awakening" (*bojjhaṅgā*) and the practice of *jhāna*.[55] The first among the seven *bojjhāṅgā* is *sati*, which is followed by analysis of mental events (*dhammavicaya*), energy (*vīriya*), joy (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Even such a simple listing of the serial arising of the seven *bojjhaṅgā* suggests that they relate similar processes to those that take place in *jhāna* – *pīti, samādhi*, and *upekkhā*, three of the last four items, occupy a prominent place in the description of the *jhānas*.

This interpretation of the seven factors of awakening as a theoretical scheme that relates to the move from *sati* to *jhāna* is echoed by the ĀSS. The overall structure of this text begins with practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), which is then said to fulfill (*paripūreti*) the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, which next fulfill the seven *bojjhaṅgas*.[56] Once these

[52] Or "the trainee's path"; the alternate readings supplied by the VRI edition of this text for *aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgato sekkho* – *aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgatā sekhā paṭipadā* or *aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgato sekho pāṭipado* – add an explicit reference to "the path."

[53] MN III.75–76: *Tatra, bhikkhave, sammādiṭṭhi pubbaṅgamā hoti. Kathañ ca, bhikkhave, sammādiṭṭhi pubbaṅgamā hoti? Sammādiṭṭhissa, bhikkhave, sammāsaṅkappo pahoti, sammāsaṅkappassa sammāvācā pahoti, sammāvācassa sammākammanto pahoti, sammākammantassa sammājīvo pahoti, sammāājīvassa sammāvāyāmo pahoti, sammāvāyāmassa sammāsati pahoti, sammāsatissa sammāsamādhi pahoti, sammāsamādhissa sammāñāṇaṃ pahoti, sammāñāṇassa sammāvimutti pahoti. Iti kho, bhikkhave, aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgato sekkho, dasaṅgasamannāgato arahā hoti.*

[54] For the Chinese version of the SPS, see Kuan (2008: appendix 1). See also Anālayo (2011: 90–96).

[55] Gethin (2001 [1992]: ch. 5, esp. 170–71). See also Bodhi (2000: 1499).

[56] This is the structure also of the one extant Chinese version of this discourse from the *Saṃyukta-āgama*. See Anālayo (2011: 664).

"elements of enlightenment" are developed, they "fulfill knowledge and liberation" (*vijja-vimuttiṃ paripūrenti*).[57] The ĀSS could thus be read as a statement of how one achieves realization after entering *jhāna* with *sati* fully established.

The ĀSS forms a central part of Kuan's (2008: ch. 3) argument regarding the fundamental connection between *sati* and *jhāna*. Kuan shows that the specific terms used by this text in order to describe *sati* meditation correspond with passages that speak of the four *jhānas* and the first three formless *samāpattis*.[58] He assembles a variety of sources that attest to the connection between *sati* and *jhāna*, including a large number of references to cases in which *sati* functions as part of the preliminary practice of *jhāna*.[59] This works quite well with the proposed interpretation of the seven factors. Kuan further collects numerous texts that suggest that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are understood as "signs of concentration" (*samādhi-nimitta*), a notion that appears to imply that the *satipaṭṭhānas* can be the content or object of *jhāna*.[60] Although his discussion is deeply relevant to the present inquiry, we can confine ourselves to reviewing his strongest example regarding the relationship between *sati* and *jhāna*, which is taken from the *Dantabhūmi-sutta* (DBS).[61]

The opening question of the DBS, presented by Prince Jayasena to the novice Aciravata, raises the question whether *sati* is meant to lead to *jhāna*. Jayasena asks about a report that "the monk who abides undistracted, ardent and resolute may reach one-pointedness of mind."[62] Here, "one-pointedness of mind" (*cittassa ekaggatam*) represents *samādhi* meditation, while the monk's description as "undistracted, ardent and resolute"

57 Or possibly, depending on how we read the compound *vijjā-vimuttiṃ*, this will lead to "liberation *through* knowledge"; *vijjā-vimuttiṃ paripūrenti* could be read either as a *dvanda* compound ("fulfills knowledge and liberation") or as an instrumental *tappurisa* ("fulfills knowledge through liberation").

58 Kuan (2008: ch. 3, esp. pp. 70–80).

59 Kuan (2008: 59–68, esp. 60–65). See also Anālayo (2003: ch. 4, 2006a: 17, n.47). It is interesting to note in this context the Buddha's instruction to Udaya in the *Pārāyaṇavagga*. In verse 1107, the Buddha says: "I explain liberation through true understanding (and) the breaking up of ignorance" (*aññāvimokhaṃ pabrūmi avijjāya pabhedanaṃ*) as "the purity of equanimity and mindfulness that is preceded by an analysis of mental events" (*upekkhāsatisaṃsuddhaṃ dhammatakkapurejavaṃ*); "the purity of equanimity and mindfulness" is clearly a reference to the fourth *jhāna*. That this purity is preceded by *dhammatakka*, a reasoned analysis of *dhammas*, resonates with the second enlightenment factor of *dhammavicaya*, which also means "an analysis of *dhammas*." For further discussion of this passage see Wynne (2007: 88–90).

60 The term *samādhi-nimitta* appears explicitly in this way in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* of the MN; Kuan collects a number of additional texts that parallel this statement (pp. 65–68).

61 "The discourse on the level attained by the restrained." MN 125, III.128–37.

62 MN III. 129: *(idha) bhikkhu appamatto ātāpī pahitatto viharanto phuseyya cittassa ekaggatan'ti*.

(*appamatto ātāpī pahitatto*) echoes the SPS's "ardent, attentive and mindful" (*ātāpī sampajāno satimā*) monk. The connection between *sati* and *jhāna* is made explicit in the Buddha's explanation of this statement later in the text. Nearing the height of his exposition, after describing the abandonment of the five hindrances, the Buddha narrates the core presentation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* ("He who is an observer of the body, abides in the body ardent, fully aware and mindful, having removed covetousness and distress in relation to the world. He who is an observer of feelings ... of the mind ... of *dhammas*.")[63] He then introduces a customary simile for *satipaṭṭhāna*, which is likened to a post to which an elephant is tied in order to tame him and to subdue his inclination to life in the wilderness. In much the same way, the Buddha tames a monk in order to subdue his tendency to the house-life and to direct his mind toward nibbāna. Then, "The Tathāgata disciplines him further – 'come, monk, abide in the body observing the body, do not think thoughts (*mā vitakkaṃ vitakkesi*) connected with desire (*kāma*).'"[64] After he repeats the same statement in relation to the other three domains of *satipaṭṭhāna*, the Buddha describes the monk entering the second *jhāna*: "Following the quieting of thought and analysis, he enters upon and settles in the second *jhāna*, which is characterized by inner serenity of mind, is unified, devoid of thought and analysis, born of concentration and characterized by pleasure and joy."[65] The Buddha next proceeds to describe the entrance into the third and fourth *jhānas*, followed by the arising to the three types of knowledge.

Kuan (2008: 68–69) is probably correct in believing that the first of these passages refers to the entrance into the second *jhāna*, which transcends *vitakka* and *vicāra* ("thought and analysis"); this passage appears to speak of a strengthening of the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* so that it transcends thought and analysis. Kuan thus sees the earlier standard presentation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, following the abandonment of the five hindrances, as referring to the first *jhāna*. Although other interpretations are available, it must be admitted that however one reads the DBS, this text unambiguously sees *satipaṭṭhāna*

[63] MN III.136: *So ... kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ.*

[64] MN III.136: *Tam enaṃ tathāgato uttariṃ vineti – 'ehi tvaṃ, bhikkhu, kāye kāyānupassī viharāhi, mā ca kāmūpasaṃhitaṃ vitakkaṃ vitakkesi. Vedanāsu... citte... dhammesu dhammānupassī viharāhi, mā ca kāmūpasaṃhitaṃ vitakkaṃ vitakkesī'"ti.*

[65] MN III.136: *So vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhattaṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ ... upasampajja viharati.*

as deeply connected to the first two *jhānas*, and especially to the first *jhāna*, which is more conceptual.[66]

Similar considerations regarding the relationship between *satipaṭṭhāna* and *jhāna* are echoed by the KGSS,[67] which is structurally related to the SPS. Following the discussion of *sati* meditation directed toward the body (*kāyagatā*), the text speaks of the entrance into the four *jhānas*. It further states that for one who has developed and fortified his mindfulness, "whichever skillful qualities that are involved in knowledge are internalized."[68] This text presents the same scheme of meditations on the body as the one that appears in the SPS. The refrain, however, is different: "Thus he abides vigilant, ardent, and resolute, and his memories and intentions that depend on the household life diminish. Once they diminish, *his mind stabilizes inwardly, becomes calm, unifies, and concentrates*. Thus, monks, a monk develops mindfulness intent on the body"[69] The KGSS thus seems to believe that *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation on the body causes the mind to unify and to immerse itself in *samādhi*. This strongly suggests an intimate relationship between the practices of mindfulness and of *jhāna*.[70]

Mention should also be made of Ajahn Sujato's (2006) readings of the *satipaṭṭhāna* materials, which is much in line with the conclusions reached here. Sujato's study is too complex to be treated fairly in this context,[71] but

[66] Anālayo (2005a: 103–4, 2006a), in light of the Chinese Madhyama-āgama parallel to the DBS, argues that the Pāli DBS is based on "a simple transmission error." Although it is clear to Anālayo that the DBS speaks of the relationship between *sati* and *jhāna*, he believes that the Pāli texts confuses "thought free *satipaṭṭhāna*" and the first *jhāna*. For further discussion of the relationship between the two versions of the texts, which includes a full translation of the Chinese DBS, see Anālayo (2006). See also Anālayo (2011: 721).

[67] There are numerous distinctions between the Pāli and the one Chinese version of this text, preserved in the *Madhyama-āgama*. Both texts, though, are replete with references to *jhāna* and clearly see "mindfulness of the body" as related to *jhāna*. See Anālayo (2011: 673–78).

[68] MN III.94: "For whomever, monks, mindfulness intent on the body has been cultivated and matured, whichever skillful qualities that are involved in knowledge are internalized" (*Yassa kassaci, bhikkhave, kāyagatāsati bhāvitā bahulīkatā, antogadhāvāssa* [the alternate reading *antogadhā tassa* is possibly preferable] *kusalā dhammā ye keci vijjābhāgiyā*).

[69] Emphasis mine. MN III.88: *Tassa evaṃ appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato ye gehasitā sarasaṅkappā te pahīyanti. Tesaṃ pahānā ajjhattam eva cittaṃ santiṭṭhati sannisīdati ekodi hoti samādhiyati. Evaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāyagatāsatiṃ bhāveti*. A similar refrain appears in the Chinese version of the KGSS. See Anālayo (2011: 676, esp. note 164).

[70] Surprisingly, this text's strong statement regarding the relationship between *sati* and *jhāna* has not been emphasized by Kuan apparently because of his focus on the manipulation of the meaning of *kāya* in the KGSS. Chapter 4 of Kuan's book is devoted to a comparison between the Pāli and Chinese versions of the KGSS. Kuan believes the Pāli version to have been synthesized from three other suttas and to have altered the meaning of the term *kāya*; originally, as in the Chinese version of the KGSS, *kāya* was a general term for the experienced world, while in the Pāli the meaning changes to "body."

[71] Sujato conducts a rich and elaborate study, but some of his assumptions demand further corroboration. For example, his methodological approach, introduced in Chapter 1 of his study,

it nevertheless serves as a powerful exposition of the theme regarding the fundamental connection between *sati* and *jhāna*. Sujato carries out a careful reading of a wide array of texts in both Pāli and Chinese and highlights the centrality of *jhāna* for the materials.[72] His basic claim is that the Pāli texts have been deliberately manipulated in a way that makes them more akin to *vipassanā*-oriented meditation. Sujato is thus sharply critical of the Theravādin "politics" that marginalized the centrality of *jhāna* in favor of meditations that are directed to an application of Buddhist wisdom.[73]

In summary, we have received much support for the understanding that *sati* and *jhāna* were originally intimately related. This possibility demands that we ask ourselves what happens when a mind in which "*sati* has been established" enters deep *samādhi*. In the next chapter, I will argue that it is in a highly cultivated awareness of this sort, which has entered deep concentration, that a direct vision of the 4NTs can take place. This would amount to liberation.

3.3 Summary

Buddhist meditative experiences, as understood in this chapter, are deeply mediated and constructed. The awareness that *satipaṭṭhāna* attempts to develop is not neutral, certainly not "naked," but rather one that has been thoroughly habituated to the Buddhist understanding of truth. Furthermore, the mind in which "mindfulness" has been established is meant to enter *jhāna* in order to intensify its experience of the truths to which it has become attuned. Thus, the liberating moments said to take place when

relies not only on sutta materials but also on what he believes to be the earliest Abhidhamma texts. His reliance on what are commonly considered to be the earliest discourses (the DCP, etc.) is also problematic as he disregards the probability that it is precisely these texts that have been subject to the most extended working over by redactors, a possibility that is enforced by the results of his own inquiry. More difficult is Sujato's favoring of the SN (or the *Saṃuykta Āgama*) over the other Nikāyas (or *Āgamas*), considering it to be the earliest collection of discourses. While Sujato's remarks on this issue are enlightening, the fact that the SN may have been organized earlier than the other Nikāyas says nothing about the antiquity of the materials it contains. For a more elaborate critique of this notion, see Anālayo (2011: 697–98, n.69).

72 For a simple example, see Sujato's discussion of *satipaṭṭhāna* in the AN, pp. 131–32.

73 An interesting example of Sujato's arguments is his discussion of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. Sujato claims that this text, which is absent from both the Dharmaguptaka and the Sarvāstivāda corpuses of the DN, is a unique Theravādin synthesis. Since it is more or less a combination of the SPS and the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*, Sujato believes it to be a deliberate attempt to direct the understanding of *satipaṭṭhāna* to *vipassanā*-oriented avenues. Sujato thinks that in the implementation of this plot, the SPS was chosen over the ĀSS and KGSS since it can more easily lend itself to an interpretation that discards the practice of *jhāna*.

such an awareness is enhanced by deep meditative *samādhi* are a unique form of wisdom. This does not mean that Buddhism did not cherish and pursue states of consciousness that are non-mediated at all,[74] but it does suggest that the central theories of liberation in the Nikāyas should not simply be said to bring practitioners "to see things as they really are."

Supplied with this understanding of mindfulness, we are prepared to investigate the philosophical events that take place in *samādhi* during practice *and* liberation. The following chapter will center on the common textual presentation of the 4NTs and will show that it is a set of highly specified meditative observations of a kind one can learn while developing or "establishing" his mindfulness. Once this point has been made, we will be prepared to come to terms with the statement that the mindful practitioner who has entered *jhāna* is liberated when he sees that "this is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering."

[74] There were obviously strands within the early community that entertained an understanding of enlightenment as a thoroughly unmediated consciousness. Such an account of *nibbāna* was suggested by Harvey (1995: chs. 10–12), based mostly on passages from the *Udāna* and the DN.

CHAPTER 4

The Four Noble Truths as Meditative Perception

The 4NTs are regarded almost universally as the heart of the Buddha's teachings.[1] Nevertheless, there is a fundamental, dramatic discrepancy between the way this doctrine is normally articulated and its presentation in the early Buddhist discourses. This chapter will show that the common understanding of the 4NTs is in need of strong revision if it is to serve as a reliable representation of the way the teaching functions in the Pāli Nikāyas. A correct comprehension of the role of the 4NTs in the early texts is also required if we are to understand the central approach to enlightenment adopted by the authors of the early discourses.

Parts of the following discussion are technical and textual so it is worth making the main, revisionary claims vividly clear. First, I will show that the concept of the four noble truths is tangential to the early discourses. Next, we will see that there is an earlier, pronounced layer of the teaching in which it functions as a set of meditative observations (4.1); this is the most important section for my overall thesis. Then the close relationship between the "four observations" – the earlier, more restricted, version of the "four noble truths" – and the doctrines of dependent-origination and selflessness will be exposed (4.2, 4.3), and the common core of these teachings as a set of meditative perceptions will be outlined. Finally, we will return to the central articulation of liberation and see if we can now make better sense of it (4.5) and offer a new approach to the Buddha's first sermon (4.6).

The customary presentation of the 4NTs – I am referring to what students of Buddhism in the West (or in contexts influenced by contact with the West) learn and read today, not to any ancient Indian source – sees them as general and universal truths that comprehensively characterize

[1] Gethin (1998: 59). This is at least true for non-Mahāyāna traditions. Mahāyāna thought tends to view the 4NTs as the representative teaching of the "inferior vehicle" (*Hīnayāna*). Chapter 24 of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* would be a good example of a Mahāyāna attempt to pledge allegiance to the 4NTs while at the same time to dramatically transform their meaning.

human experience. The first truth says that all events and aspects of human life are painful (*dukkha*) or unsatisfying.[2] The second truth sees all these painful events as having, broadly, a single cause, defined as "thirst" (*taṇhā*), desire (*kāma*, *rāga*, *cchanda*, etc.), or at times as "attachment" (*upādāna*). The third truth claims that all human suffering can be uprooted through one specific, quite rare achievement, "enlightenment" or *nibbāna*;[3] this event is viewed as *the* ultimate truth for all people. The fourth truth introduces the path (*magga*) that all human beings are to cultivate in order to direct their hearts and minds toward liberation.[4]

Although we will soon see that there is little evidence for the teaching of the 4NTs in the early discourses, the presentation of this doctrine as a set of universal truths does not arise from nowhere. In what is considered the Buddha's first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* (DCP, "The discourse on the setting in motion of the wheel of *dhamma*"), we find more than traces of these ideas. In the following foundational passage, the Buddha presents the 4NTs in a manner that is at least reminiscent of the generalized understanding of the teaching just outlined:

> This, monks, is the noble truth that is suffering: birth is suffering, and old age is suffering, and death is suffering, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and disturbance are suffering, being connected to what one dislikes is suffering, being apart from what is dear is suffering, and not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.
>
> This, monks is the noble truth that is the origin of suffering: this thirst for renewed existence, which is accompanied by passion and delight, which finds pleasure here and there, which is the thirst for sensual pleasure (*kāma*), the thirst for states of being (*bhava*), the thirst for non being (*vibhava*).

2 The precise meaning of *dukkha* is still debated. Often it is suggested that the term does not imply the quite unpleasant consequence that all events of human lives are painful or should be seen as "suffering." Thus, *dukkha* is understood to refer to a sense of unease or imperfection that accompanies all human experience (see, for example, Gethin [1998: 60–61]). Although such an understanding applies in certain contexts, I believe it to be oversimplified with regard to the historical and ascetic context in which the Buddha preached. MWSD's suggestion to derive *duḥkha* from *duḥ<sthā>* – "a bad state of being" – seems to me an adequate expression of the meaning of the term in the context of the early teachings. Edgerton in BHSD uses "misery." Here I will employ the terms "suffering" and "pain/painful" interchangeably. For further discussion, see Harvey (2009: 213–16).

3 The almost diametrically opposed meanings of the terms used to speak of liberation from suffering attest to the complex reality behind this supposedly universal event. Among these terms are both *bodhi* – "enlightenment" or "awakening", and *nibbāna*, which is closer to "darkening." See for example the first definition for *nibbāna* in PED as "the going out of a lamp or fire."

4 The 4NTs are often thought (e.g. Gethin [1998: 63–64]) to be structured according to a classical medical model that contains an identification of (1) an illness, (2) its cause, (3) cure, and (4) medicine or treatment. For further reflection on this model, see Halbfass (1991: ch. 7).

> This, monks, is the noble truth that is the cessation of suffering: The utter passionless cessation of that very thirst, its abandoning and relinquishing, the emancipation from it, its having no root.
>
> This, monks, is the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering: this noble eightfold path that is right view, right intention, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right energy, right mindfulness, right concentration.[5]

Broadly, this passage corresponds with the position of the 4NTs that life is suffering, which is caused by desire and that will end in *nibbāna* as the consummation of the Buddhist path. If it is read carefully, however, it can easily be seen to diverge from the more innocent and less metaphysically committed modern take on the teaching and to expresses meanings more akin to the views of ancient Indian asceticism. Here we speak of "the thirst for renewed existence" (*ponobhavikataṇhā*) as a problem, and the point about human existence being characterized by *dukkha* is made in an awkward way – why is it, for instance, that birth is suffering/painful/unsatisfying? Why should the physical pain of birth trouble the fiery seeker of truth? That "the five aggregates of clinging are suffering" could also be read to suggest that any potential experience is inherently painful, and thus that the escape offered by *nibbāna* must be a total fading away or dying out of presence in the world. But other readings of this seminal text are available as well, and even-though these statements are troubling, the text is still close enough to the meanings that modern students of Buddhism hope to find. The DCP, or its more elaborate articulation in the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*,[6] are taken as examples for the expression of the 4NTs in the early canon since they *can* be seen to conform to the popular presentation of the teaching. In scholarly discourse, although a number of leading studies have shown that the DCP cannot be taken at face value,[7] the aura of the first sermon has led scholars to accept this presentation of the 4NTs as authentic. Even among

[5] SN V.421–422: *Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ – jātipi dukkhā jarāpi dukkhā byādhipi dukkho maraṇampi dukkhaṃ appiyehi sampayogo dukkho piyehi vippayogo dukkho yam picchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ – yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī seyyathidaṃ kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ – yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ – ayam eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo seyyathidaṃ sammādiṭṭhi sammāsaṅkappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhi.*

[6] "The discourse on the exposition of the truths" (MN 141, III. 248–252).

[7] For a convenient summary of this approach, see Anderson (1999: 19–21), who refers to studies conducted by Bareau, Norman, Schmithausen, Bronkhorst and Skilling. See also Vetter (1988: XXVIII–XXXIII).

the scholars who doubt the authenticity of certain elements of the text – in the sense that parts of the sermon should be thought of as later accretions – none question the DCP's presentation of the 4NTs.

The mere fact that this presentation of the 4NTs was included in the Buddha's "first sermon," even if this inclusion was authorized at a later date, attests to the sustainability of the philosophically-oriented, universalistic interpretation of the doctrine and to its popularity within the Buddhist tradition. But a careful reading of the regular presentation of the 4NTs in the Nikāyas suggests that this is not the way the teaching was originally formulated. In fact, once we appreciate the manner in which the texts normally expound the 4NTs, we will see that there is reason to doubt that the passage we just read was part of the original structure of the DCP.

In stark contrast to the picture of the doctrine as a set of universal truths, the Pāli texts describe the cultivation and realization of the 4NTs almost ubiquitously in terms that suggest a personal, even an intimate, perception of particular, current conscious events. The realization of the 4NTs is manifestly not of an abstract or generalized notion of truth but an understanding of specific moments of experience – "*this* is suffering (*idaṃ dukkaṃ*), *this* is the arising of suffering (*ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo*), *this* is the cessation of suffering (*ayaṃ dukkhanirodho*), *this* is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering (*ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā*)."[8] Nothing is said about *all* experiences; certainly nothing is claimed about the experiences of other people. This realization pertains to exclusively individual and personal cognitive events one perceives in real time and that bear no all-encompassing philosophical significance. Philosophy is here a direct perception, probably a meditative one, or at the very least an appraisal of a specific subjective occurrence.

In a recent essay, Peter Harvey (2009) has suggested that the 4NTs be termed "the four realities for the spiritually ennobled" since their focus is not on propositional knowledge but on realities experienced by the noble ones. This provocative proposal is the only attempt of which I am aware to frame the teaching not as a set of universal philosophical truths but as reflecting concrete experiences. Although I disagree with Harvey on specific points, primarily on the place of the notion of a "noble truth/truth for the noble ones" in the earlier form of the doctrine, the analysis I will conduct here may be seen as a specification and refinement of some of Harvey's arguments. I will attempt to supply some description of the "realities" he identifies. I will not, however, join the call for an adoption

[8] Technically, in the Pāli the "truths" are each framed with an *iti* – *'idaṃ dukkhan'ti*, etc.

of a new name for doctrine, especially since the developments it went through cannot be discarded; today the 4NTs have important meanings in Buddhist discourse in which they are first and foremost philosophical truths. Although initially the teaching relied on the realities of personal, probably meditative, experiences, this focus changed with time. Here we wish not only to support the understanding that the 4NTs were at first concrete experiences but also to figure out what these experiences were about. This becomes possible when we carefully study the early texts, *without* reading the DCP's formulation of the 4NTs, or others inspired by it, into them.

In a remarkable contribution to the study of the 4NTs, K. R. Norman (1982) has shown that in the passage we just read from the DCP, the notion of a "noble truth" is a relatively late insertion. In his short paper, Norman demonstrated that the Pāli grammar of the DCP's presentation of the 4NTs is confounded. The basic problem is that in the definition of the 4NTs – *idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ* . . . *idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ* . . . *idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ* . . . *idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ* ("this is the noble truth that is suffering, this is the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, this is the noble truth that is the cessation suffering, this is the noble truth that is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering") – the gender of the terms is mistaken: the masculine *samudayo* ("arising") and *nirodho* ("cessation") have mysteriously turned into the neuter *samudayaṃ* and *nirodhaṃ*. This change matches an alteration in the gender of the corresponding pronoun from the masculine *ayaṃ* to the neuter *idaṃ*. Surprisingly, in the fourth noble truth, *dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā* remains in the feminine while its pronoun becomes neuter and corresponds to (*ariya*) *saccaṃ*.

Norman continues to show that certain explanations may be offered for the meaning of the formula as it appears today. Nonetheless, a comparison with parallel versions of the same text as well as with other formulas, in both Pāli and Sanskrit, suggests that redactors within the Pāli tradition felt insecure about the new reading; in fact, in many cases the correct grammatical forms were retained, most commonly in cases where *ariyasaccaṃ* is omitted. The fact that *ariyasaccaṃ* does not appear in many versions or in parts of these versions demonstrates that this term was not a part of the original formulation of the teaching. As Norman says at the end of his presentation, "we may conclude that the earliest form of this *sutta* did not include the word *ariya-saccaṃ*,"[9] and thus that the notion of a "noble

[9] Norman (1982: 389).

truth" is a late addition to the text. Most importantly, he argues that "the correct form of the NTs in Pāli is: *idaṃ dukkhaṃ, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā* – 'This is pain, this is the origin of pain, this is the cessation of pain, this is the path leading to the cessation of pain.'"[10] Although Norman's study has influenced numerous scholars,[11] its deep consequences have yet to be fully realized. In a sense, large parts of this chapter are not much more than a fleshing out of the implications of Norman's crucial observation.

Near the beginning of his paper, Norman quotes Johansson, who attempts to provide an explanation for the grammatical anomaly in the DCP. Johansson suggests that the terms *dukkhasamudayaṃ* and *dukkha-nirodhaṃ* (the arising and cessation of suffering, respectively) should be read as possessive (or exocentric) compounds and thus as adjectives – the "pain-originating" and "pain-ceasing" truths. This solution has been adopted by Harvey, in the paper mentioned above.[12] Harvey defines the four truths as "realities" that are experienced by *ariya*-beings, and he therefore views their definition as *ariya-saccas*, "noble truths," as integral to the text. Although Johansson's solution does not remove the confusion regarding the fourth NT, which unlike the second and third ones has not changed its gender in order to conform to *ariya-saccaṃ*, Harvey believes that it can be treated differently.[13]

We must notice that the solution offered by Johansson is not without problems. What does it mean to speak of a "pain-originating" or a "pain-ceasing" truth?[14] Surely this should not imply that the second noble truth causes pain or that the third truth brings about the cessation of pain, rather than being equal to the destruction and cessation of pain itself. Certainly, "the truth *about* the origin/cessation of pain" sounds much better,[15] and this is probably what was intuitively understood by readers through the ages. This reading may be grammatically sound, but it still reads less smoothly than what Norman sees as the original version of the text, "this is suffering, etc." Moreover, as Norman says, Johansson's solution "does not take account of the fact that we should expect the grammar and syntax of each of the the four NTs to be the same."[16] That is, this reading cannot apply to the fourth noble truth, and hence it seems problematic in relation to the first three as well.

[10] Norman (1982: 388).
[11] Norman's paper contributed to studies such as Carter (1993: 77), Anderson (1999: 17–21), Anālayo (2006a), and Harvey (2009).
[12] Johansson (1977 [1973]: 24); Harvey (2009: 217–220).
[13] Harvey (2009: 219).
[14] Harvey (2009: 218).
[15] Johansson (1977 [1973]: 24).
[16] Norman (1982: 378).

It is interesting to discover that the grammatical anomaly is only the beginning of the problem: an analysis of the overall appearance of the compound *ariyasacca* ("noble truth") in the four major Nikāyas strongly suggests that the notion of "noble truths" is a relatively late one. Not only is this term remarkably rare, but it tends to appear in contexts in which we have good reason to assume that the text has been manipulated. Outside the *Sacca-saṃyutta* of the SN, in which the term was apparently inserted in all of its discourses following its introduction into the DCP, the term *ariyasacca* appears in only thirteen discourses in the whole of the major four Nikāyas. A number of these occurrences are clearly tangential as they merely mention the notion of the "(four) noble truth(s)" in passing while they offer no real engagement with the concept. Indeed, we would expect that when the term became popular, the redactors of the texts would have allowed it to creep into a number of discourses.

It is especially revealing to see which texts employ the concept of the "noble truths"; we may go so far as to suggest that the appearance of the term *ariyasacca* marks the most cherished texts in the eyes of the compilers of the Pāli canon, the ones they thought fit to carry the new message of the "noble truths." In the DN, "noble truths" appear only in three discourses – the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (DN 16), the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (DN 22), and the *Dasuttara-sutta* (DN 34). The first of these texts, which relates the "official" Theravāda views regarding the death of the Buddha, is widely recognized as a text that has suffered from a relatively large amount of dogmatic intervention. The last of the three is another "official" text that together with the better known *Saṅgīti-sutta*, which appears immediately before it, summarizes the fundamental teachings of the Buddha from an early Abhidhammic perspective. The *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* has been defined by Ajahn Sujato as "a leading contender for the title of the latest discourse in the four Nikāyas"[17] and is basically a combination of two texts from the MN in which the term *ariyasacca* appears – the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*, which I will examine separately. The *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* is not much more than an attempt to highlight the concepts of the 4NTs in the context of mindfulness meditation; the fact that this presentation of the 4NTs has been technically inserted into the SPS itself attests to the relatively late emphasis on the doctrine of the 4NTs. These three texts thus represent the latest strata of Pāli discourse composition, and the fact that they are the only ones in the DN which employ the term *ariyasacca* indicates that we are dealing with a relatively young concept.

[17] See note 74 to Chapter 3.

A similar pattern is nearly reproduced in the MN. The three main texts in which the term *ariyasacca* functions are the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* (MN 28), the SPS (MN 10), and the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta* (MN 141).[18] The last of these is a commentary on the DCP, another text that naturally voices the "official" views of the tradition. It is thus clearly very late. The SPS is one of the texts through which the tradition developed its self-image, a discourse that appears to have received a particularly large amount of redactors' attention, as discussed in the previous chapter. The first of these texts defines itself at the outset as an organization of the whole of the Buddha's teachings according to the concepts of the 4NTs.[19] It thus can be regarded as reflecting a stage in which the doctrine of the 4NTs began to spread and to receive attention and recognition.

In the whole of the AN, we find only two instances in which the term "noble truths" is employed. One is in the *Baladaṭṭhabba-sutta* (AN 5.15), which lists the five powers (*bala*) and names the 4NTs as the place where "the power of wisdom (*paññābala*) is to be seen."[20] Nothing is said about the theoretical content of the teaching, and rather an event of "seeing" is referred to. This statement is identical to SN V.196 that repeats it in relation to "the faculty of wisdom" (*paññindriya*).[21] Interestingly, in most cases that discuss the power or the faculty of wisdom, the texts define them as a perception of arising and passing away, which itself can lead to the destruction of suffering.[22] This suggests that the notion of the 4NTs relies on an earlier notion of wisdom as a perception regarding the arising and ceasing of mental events, an understanding that will soon prove to be of great importance. The more interesting case from the AN in which the term *ariyasacca* appears is in the *Titthāyatanādi-sutta* (AN 3.62) that will be quoted and analyzed below since it supplies a unique, unconventional definition of the 4NTs that corresponds to their presentation here.

18 In two other places, at MN II.10 and III.245, the term "noble truths" is mentioned only in passing.

19 Sāriputta says: "Just as, friend, any footstep of a jungle animal can be placed within the elephants footprint, and the elephant footprint is known as their chief because of its greatness, so all wholesome things can be included in the four noble truths. . .."

seyyathāpi, āvuso, yāni kānici jaṅgalānaṃ pāṇānaṃ padajātāni sabbāni tāni hatthipade samodhānaṃ gacchanti, hatthipadaṃ tesaṃ aggam akkhāyati yadidaṃ mahantattena; evam eva kho, āvuso, ye keci kusalā dhammā sabbe te catūsu ariyasaccesu saṅgahaṃ gacchanti. . ."

20 *Kattha ca, bhikkhave, paññābalaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ? Catūsu ariyasaccesu. Ettha paññābalaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ.*

21 *Kattha ca, bhikkhave, paññindriyaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ? Catūsu ariyasaccesu. Ettha paññindriyaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ.* Note that *paññābala* and *paññindriya* are equated in the *Sāketa-sutta* at SN V.219.

22 AN 5.2 and 5.14; SN V.197,199,200. See the quote at the end of this section from the *Dutiyavibhaṅga-sutta*.

As for the SN, this collection mentions the "noble truths" two more times outside of the *Sacca-saṃyutta*, neither of these occurrences being of any real significance.[23]

Finally, we have the DCP itself, the hailed "first sermon of the Buddha." This is precisely the text that a budding religious tradition would manipulate in the process of developing its self-understanding; it is in this text we would expect to present the Buddha and his truths as *ariya*. Following the embellishment of the DCP with the concept of *ariyasacca*, this term apparently infiltrated into the other discourses with which it is housed in the collection of the *Sacca-saṃyutta*.

These observations regarding the scarcity of the term *ariyasacca* in the Pāli canon and the context in which the term appears fit well with the picture that arises from Norman's analysis. We are thus reinforced in the understanding that the term *ariyasacca* reflects a relatively late textual stratum. This understanding is also supported by Anālayo's (2006) analysis of a Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*, which speaks only of "four truths" and appears to be unaware of the development that sees them as "noble." Anālayo continues to list a number of other discourses from the *Ekottarika-āgama* as well as from other *āgamas* and from three different Chinese *vinaya* traditions, which speak only of "four truths" without qualifying them as "noble." Surprisingly, one of these texts is a translation of the DCP.[24] Anālayo sees his findings as a confirmation of Norman's hypothesis.[25]

No less instructive is the observation that it is not only the term *ariyasacca* that is so late in the Nikāyas; the definitions of the 4NTs supplied by the DCP are just as infrequent. The Nikāyas are quite uninterested in the statement, for example, that "birth is suffering." Although the discussion of "the eightfold noble path" appears quite often, the DCP's definition of the first three truths is almost unknown to the Nikāyas. It is completely absent from the DN, almost absent from

[23] Aside from the *Daṭṭhabba-sutta* (SN V.196) just mentioned, there are two cases in verse: at SN II.185, *Dhammapada* 191 is quoted; at SN I.210 realization is referred to as a seeing of the noble truth(s) with no mention of this truth being fourfold.

[24] Anālayo (2006a: 149–150).

[25] Anālayo mentions one text in which he believes that "this qualification (i.e. *ariyasacca*) would have been present from the outset: at SN V.28 it is said that 'the four truths are called noble because the Tathāgata is noble' (*tahtāgato ariyo tasmā 'ariyasaccānī'ti vuccanti*)." It must be noted that the fact that this text has no meaning if the truths are not defined as noble does not necessarily mean that the concept of the "noble truths" is early. This discourse itself could be part of the attempt to legitimize the concept of the "noble truths", which appears to be a central concern of the *Sacca-saṃyutta* in which it appears.

the AN,[26] and appears in only four texts of the MN. Of these last MN texts, two (the *Mahāhattipādopama-sutta* and the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta*) were just referred to in the demonstration of the term *ariyasacca*'s scarcity in the Nikāyas, and a third, the *sammādiṭṭhi-sutta*, is also a discourse that reflects mature doctrinal development. This last text also makes no mention of the four truths being "noble." The concept of a "noble truth" is also unknown to the fourth text of the MN that is acquainted with the DCP's definitions of the 4NTs, the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*. This discourse, together with a few others from the SN's *Khandha-saṃyutta* and two discourses from *Sacca-saṃyutta* that follow immediately after the DCP, are the only contexts in the *Nikāyas* in which we encounter any engagement with the doctrine of the 4NTs as they are defined by the DCP. The main contribution of these texts is that they employ the language of the DCP but replace the term *dukkha* in the first noble truth with the concepts of the *khandhas* (the aggregates, SN III.158, V.425), of *ajjhātikāyatana* ("the inner [sense] bases," SN V.426), of *bhāra* ("the burden," SN III.26), and of *sakkāya* ("identity," MN I. 299 and SN III.158, 159). Once again, it is interesting to note that even among these texts only the one from the *Sacca-saṃyutta* appear to be acquainted with the concept of a "noble truth."

When we see that both the concept of the "noble truths" and the presentation of the 4NTs as they appear in the DCP are of striking rarity in the Nikāyas, it seems worthwhile to inquire into the way the texts normally speak of the four (noble) truths.[27] In fact, it may be preferable to forsake the concept of "truths" together with the notion that the four "truths" are "noble." Rather, we must now simply ask what the texts mean when they introduce the formula "*this* is suffering, *this* is the arising of suffering, *this* is the cessation of suffering, *this* is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering."

4.1 *This*

When we come to analyze the central expression *idaṃ dukkhan(ti), ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo(ti), ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho(ti), ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā(ti)* – "this is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path that leads to the cessation of

[26] The *Titthāyatanādi-sutta* (AN 3.62, discussed below) employs the DCP's definition for the first NT.

[27] It is difficult to assess the precise frequency of the formula of the four truths in the major four Nikāyas. Counting the *Mahāvagga* of the SN, it appears in approximately 120 discourses; but there are many other versions that are modeled on this formula, mainly when it is applied to concepts other than suffering (see below). Including all such instances would lead to a count of a good few hundred discourses.

suffering" – defined by Norman as "the correct form of the 4NTs," we immediately enter a dilemma. Given that this formula relates an earlier expression of the 4NTs than the one we normally speak of, one which is unaware of the notion of a "noble truth," how will we call this teaching? Hereafter, I will refer to this formula as "the original formula of the 4NTs" or "the formula of the four truths" and refer to this stage of the teaching as "the four truths" (to be distinguished from the four *noble* truths) or "the four observations." As we will see, this last term represents the doctrine at this period of its maturation in the finest manner.

The most striking feature of the original formula of the 4NTs is that it must relate to specific events that are perceived in real time; the pronoun *idaṃ/ayaṃ* employed by the texts in relation to each of the four limbs of the formula is reserved for objects that can be pointed to specifically by the observer – "this" or "this here." Pāli, like Sanskrit, distinguishes between four types of demonstrative pronouns, which are defined according to the degree of distance between the object they characterize and the subject who views them: *so/sā/tam* for a regular "this," "*asu*" for a distant "that," and *ayaṃ/idaṃ* or *eso/etat/esā* for a closer "this here" that can be pointed at directly. The Pāli-English dictionary defines *ayaṃ* thus: "*ayaṃ* refers to *what is immediately in front* of the speaker (the subject in question) or before his eyes or his present time and situation, thus often to be translated as 'before our eyes,' 'the present,' 'this here,' 'just this'" (p. 75, emphasis in the original). The *Critical Pāli Dictionary*, too, provides "this (here), just this, the present." Thus, when a text says, for instance, "*idaṃ dukkhaṃ*" – "*this* is suffering" – it is describing a concrete, present event, which is "immediately in front of the speaker," as painful.

Theoretically, the statement "this is suffering" can be applied to any event. One can be sitting, for example, on the dentist's chair and say that "this is suffering." Nevertheless, taking into account the context of early Buddhist praxis, it seems natural that the wording of the formula refers to events that occur in states of concentrated meditation; in focused, one-pointed *samādhi*, events may be experienced as "*this* is suffering, *this* is the arising of suffering, etc." This is, in fact, precisely what the opening discourse of the *Sacca-saṃyutta* ("The collection of the truths"), the *Samādhi-sutta*, describes:

> Monks, cultivate *samādhi*. In *samādhi*, monks, a monk knows truly (*yathābhūtaṃ*[28]). What does he know truly? He knows truly 'this is suffering';

[28] The translation offered at times for *yathābhūtaṃ* "as (things) truly *arise*" could be appropriate here.

> he knows truly 'this is the arising of suffering'; he knows truly 'this is the cessation of suffering'; he knows truly 'this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.' Cultivate *samādhi*, monks. In *samādhi*, monks, a monk knows truly.
>
> Therefore, here, monks, 'this is suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the arising of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the cessation of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced.[29]

This discourse leaves no doubt that at least some practitioners felt that the original formula of the 4NTs was part of the practice of *samādhi* meditation. The fact that this discourse was positioned at the opening of the central collection of discourses on the topic of "the truths" in the Nikāyas further suggests that this was not a minority view. Later in the same collection, in the *Āsavakkhaya-sutta*, "The discourse on the destruction of the inflows," the rationale of this practice is communicated:

> Monks, for one who knows and sees, I say, there is destruction of the inflows (*āsava*), not for one who does not know and see. And what, monks, is the destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees? There is destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees 'this is suffering.' There is destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees 'this is the arising of suffering.' There is destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees 'this is the cessation of suffering.' There is destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees 'this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.' Thus, monks, there is destruction of the inflows for one who knows and sees.
>
> Therefore, here, monks, 'this is suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the arising of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the cessation of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced. 'This is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering' is a yoga that should be practiced."[30]

This discourse points to the significance of the practice that is at the base of the original formula of the 4NTs: a correct vision of these truths leads to

[29] SN V.414: *Samādhiṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvetha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Kiñ ca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti? 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Samādhiṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvetha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Tasmāt iha, bhikkhave, 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yogo karaṇīyo, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yogo karaṇīyo, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yogo karaṇīyo, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yogo karaṇīyoti.*

[30] SN V. 434: *Jānatohaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayaṃ vadāmi, no ajānato apassato. Kiñ ca, bhikkhave, jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti? 'Idaṃ dukkhan'ti, bhikkhave, jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti jānato passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, jānato evaṃ passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti. Tasmāt iha, bhikkhave, 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yogo karaṇīyo. . .pe. . . 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yogo karaṇīyoti.*

the destruction of the inflows, an event that is elsewhere said to equal liberation. Together, the two texts quoted already offer a forceful presentation of the understanding that is at the heart of this study – acts of vision performed in *samādhi*, which conform to the fourfold method of observation that later became "the four noble truths," brings about the liberating event of the destruction of inflows.

The four observations – that is, the original formula of the 4NTs – are of great importance to the *Sacca-saṃyutta*. As the reader may have noticed, these two texts end with the same refrain, which states that each of the four elements of the formula is "a yoga that should be practiced" (*yogo karaṇīyo*). This refrain appears at the end of each and every discourse in the *Sacca-saṃyutta*, 131 suttas in all,[31] with the exception of two – the DCP and the text that follows it in the collection, which is modelled on a part of the DCP. This fact itself may suggest that the DCP may not have been an original part of this collection.

It is important to notice that the *Sacca-saṃyutta*'s refrain does not lend itself to an interpretation of the original formula of the 4NTs as describing events that take place in liberation. Rather, it defines the observations that constitute the formula as a method of mental cultivation – as "a yoga that should be practiced." The formula thus seems to have been understood as a technique to be used in order to analyze and reflect on the contents of awareness, particularly the contents of meditative experiences. This notion of the four truths as guiding the practitioner in meditation is expressed in other texts as well as when the Buddha instructs the monks to conceptualize (*vitakkeyyātha*), think about (*cinteyyātha*), and speak of (*kattheyyātha*) the four truths[32] or when Ānanda describes them as "wisdom of training" (*sekhā paññā*).[33]

The formula of the four observations thus introduces a way of looking at the contents of experience: an event that arises is identified as suffering; its manner of arising (*samudaya*), that is the conditions that give rise to it, its "origin," is noted. Then, maintaining a correct attitude toward the causal process involved in "the arising of suffering" allows for "the cessation of suffering." This attitude equates "the path that leads to the cessation of suffering."

When we examine the way the formula of the four observations is employed in the Nikāyas, we find that common practice is to replace the

31 There is much repetition in this collection, particularly in the last seventy discourses, which add only minor variations to one central theme.
32 These definitions appear in Discourses 7–9 of the *Sacca-saṃyutta* at SN V. 417–419.
33 See the *Mahānāmasakka-sutta* at AN 3.74, quoted on page 153.

concept of suffering with other terms and to investigate their "arising," "cessation," and "the path that leads to their cessation." For example, the *Paccaya-sutta* ("The discourse on conditions") of the NS introduces each of the twelve links, then states that its arising and ceasing is conditioned by the arising and ceasing of the previous link, and finally that "the path to the cessation" of the link is the eightfold noble path. Then it says:

> Once, monks, a disciple of the noble ones knows the condition (*paccaya*) in this way, he knows the arising of the condition in this way, he knows the cessation of the condition in this way, he knows the path that leads to the cessation of the condition in this way; this disciple of the noble ones is called, monks, one who has perfected the view, one who has perfected vision, one who has reached this *dhamma* of truth, one who sees this *dhamma* of truth, one endowed with training knowledge, one endowed with training knowledge of truth, one who has entered the stream of *dhamma*, a noble possessor of penetrating wisdom who stands knocking on the door of the deathless.[34]

This is a forceful statement – a practitioner who knows how to examine the twelve links through the concepts of the four observations "stands knocking on the door of the deathless" after having reached a state that he is in direct contact with Buddhist truth. This passage points to a close connection between the four truths and dependent-origination, which we will analyze in the next section. Specifically, the method of observation outlined here directs the disciple to know (*pajānāti*) (1) each of the twelve links – "the condition" (*paccaya*), together with (2) its arising – its cause, that is the previous link, (3) its cessation, that is the cessation of the previous link, and (4) the path that leads to its cessation, which is the eightfold noble path. One who knows things in this way has attained forms of vision and knowledge that will stimulate his or her liberation.

Similar statements are repeated in the discourses that follow the *Paccaya-sutta*. In the next discourse, the *Bhikkhu-sutta*, the term *paccaya* is replaced by a direct listing of the twelve links; the monk who knows each of the links, its arising, cessation, and the path that leads to its cessation is

[34] SN II.43: *Yato kho, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako evaṃ paccayaṃ pajānāti, evaṃ paccayasamudayaṃ pajānāti, evaṃ paccayanirodhaṃ pajānāti, evaṃ paccayanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako diṭṭhisampanno itipi, dassanasampanno itipi, āgato imaṃ saddhammaṃ itipi, passati imaṃ saddhammaṃ itipi, sekkhena ñāṇena samannāgato itipi, sekkhāya vijjāya samannāgato itipi, dhammasotaṃ samāpanno itipi, ariyo nibbedhikapañño itipi, amatadvāraṃ āhacca tiṭṭhati itipīti.*

described with the same terms that the disciple of the noble ones is described in the *Paccaya-sutta*. The next two discourses state that only ascetics and Brahmins who know the twelve links through this same fourfold analysis are true to their name.[35] Particularly instructing is the statement in the following *Bhūta-sutta*:

> And how, sir, has one understood the *dhamma*? He sees "this has come to be" (*bhūta*) with correct wisdom truly. Having seen "this has come to be" with correct wisdom truly, following detachment from what has come to be, following dispassion toward it, following its cessation, not taking hold of it, one is liberated. He sees "(this is) the arising (*saṃbhava*) of its nutriment" with correct wisdom truly. Having seen "(this is) the arising of its nutri ment" with correct wisdom truly, following detachment from the arising of nutriment, following dispassion toward it, following its cessation, not taking hold of it, one is liberated. He sees with correct wisdom truly "following the cessation of its nutriment, that which has come to be has ceased." Having seen with correct wisdom truly "following the cessation of its nutriment, that which has come to be has ceased," following detachment from the cessation of nutriment, following dispassion toward it, following its cessation, not taking hold of it, one is liberated. Thus, sir, one has understood the *dhamma*.[36]

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, it points to a potential reflection on a wide range of phenomena as the objects of analysis – anything that "has come to be" or "has arisen" (*bhūta*) is fit to be viewed according to the logic of the four truths. Second, the text employs new concepts in order to relate to the processes involved in the generation and eradication of "what has come to be," referring to "the arising of its nutriment" (*tadāhārasaṃbhava*) and to "the cessation of its nutriment" (*tadāhāranirodha*). These concepts are clear parallels to the ones used in the formula of the four truths – arising, here referred to by *saṃbhava* rather than by *samudaya*, and cessation, together with the idea that "what has come to be" is supported by "nutriment." The sustained interest in processes of arising and cessation even though the concepts used

[35] These are the *Samaṇabrāhmaṇa-sutta* and the *Dutiyasamaṇabrāhmaṇa-sutta* at SN II.45–46. These two discourses are repeated in *Sacca-saṃyutta* as numbers 13 and 14 of this collection.

[36] SN II.49–50: *Kathañ ca, bhante, saṅkhātadhammo hoti? Bhūtam idanti, bhante, yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati. Bhūtam idanti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā bhūtassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto hoti. Tadāhārasambhavanti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati. Tadāhārasambhavanti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā āhārasambhavassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto hoti. Tadāhāranirodhā yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammanti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati. Tadāhāranirodhā yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammanti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā nirodhadhammassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto hoti. Evaṃ kho, bhante, saṅkhātadhammo hoti.*

to communicate these notions are new suggests that the four truths convey a method of observation that is primary to the terminology used to express it; the observation of the processes of arising and cessation of events is at the fore. In the same vein, notice that the fourth truth is not referred to explicitly through the notion of "the path," but is represented by the mental attitude of "detachment (*nibbidā*), dispassion (*virāga*), cessation (*nirodha*), and not taking hold of (*anupāda*)," which one adopts toward the observations defined.

Finally, this text explains how one achieves liberation through a correct envisaging of "what has come to be"; the observation of such events, their arising and cessation, stimulates an attitude of detachment that leads to liberation. After observing the right object "with correct wisdom truly, following detachment from it, following the dispassion toward it, following its cessation, not taking hold of it, one is liberated." The act of "seeing with correct wisdom" generates a mental stance of dispassion and detachment that directs the specific events to their ends.

The *Bhūta-sutta* thus suggests three principles that can function as the defining characteristics of the employment of the method of observation that is at the heart of the formula of the four truths: (1) It serves to reflect on any object, particularly objects of meditative reflection; (2) The terms are secondary to the method of observation itself, which focuses on the transitory, conditioned processes of arising and ceasing and on the maintenance of an attitude of detachment; (3) This method of seeing is liberating.

In the discourses we examined above, the four truths appeared as a technique employed in meditative practice in order to examine the contents of awareness; they were specifically defined as a "yoga" or a spiritual exercise that is to be applied to the objects of reflection. The *Bhūta-sutta*, which explicitly discusses the way these observations are involved in liberation, is aware of the practice-oriented side of the doctrine as well. Prior to the passage just quoted, Sāriputta explains the way this same method of observation is used in stages of practice. The passage we read refers to someone who "has understood the *dhamma*" (*saṅkhātad-hammo*) while before it the method of observation of a "trainee" (*sekho*) is described. It is crucial to notice the intimate connection between practice and liberation – the passages are absolutely identical, aside from the phrase that one who is in training, who "has seen 'this has come to be,' etc., with correct wisdom truly, *is practicing toward* (*paṭipanno hoti*) the detachment from, the dispassion toward, the cessation of 'what has come

to be,' etc."[37] At first one practices the method of observation; later one is liberated through it.

The authors of the *Bhūta-sutta* apparently thought that the formula of the four truths and its derivatives are relevant both to practice toward liberation and to liberation itself. One practices the formula until its point of view takes root and becomes a natural way of seeing, which stimulates true detachment. This approach is on par with the understanding of Buddhist philosophy that was outlined in the previous chapter: Buddhist methods of observation were meant to be practiced until they are woven into the perceptual apparatus. What was initially a mechanical effort to categorize and understand experiences according to Buddhist schemes of analysis, eventually becomes a way of seeing. This mature form of Buddhist perception next stimulates emotional and cognitive attitudes that facilitate liberation.

We find further support for this understanding in numerous texts. Thus, for instance, says the *Dhammakathika-sutta*, in words that repeat in part the formulation in the *Bhūta-sutta*:

> (1) If a monk teaches the doctrine for detachment from, for dispassion toward, for the cessation of old age and death (. . . of ignorance), he may be called "a monk who speaks the doctrine." (2) If a monk practices for detachment from, for dispassion toward, for the cessation of old age and death, he may be called "a monk who practices in accordance with the doctrine." (3) If a monk, following the detachment from old age and death, following the dispassion toward it, following its cessation, not taking hold of it, is liberated, he may be called "a monk who has seen the *dhamma* and attained *nibbāna*."[38]

This passage defines three levels of comprehension, each of which reflects a distinct intensity of engagement with Buddhist doctrine. One can teach the *dhamma*, follow the *dhamma*, or realize the very same *dhamma*. Buddhist truth is relevant in different ways on the distinct levels of practice

[37] SN II.48: '*Bhūtam idan'ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā bhūtassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti.' Tadāhārasambhavan'ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati. 'Tadāhārasambhavan'ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā āhārasambhavassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti. 'Tadāhāranirodhā yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamman'ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati.' Tadāhāranirodhā yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamman'ti yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya disvā nirodhadhammassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti. Evaṃ kho, bhante, sekkho hoti.*

[38] SN II.18: *Jarāmaraṇassa ce bhikkhu nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya dhammaṃ deseti 'dhammakathiko bhikkhū'ti alaṃ vacanāya. Jarāmaraṇassa ce bhikkhu nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti 'dhammānudhammappaṭipanno bhikkhū'ti alaṃ vacanāya. Jarāmaraṇassa ce bhikkhu nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādāvimutto hoti 'diṭṭhadhammanibbānappatto bhikkhū'ti alaṃ vacanāya.*

Interestingly, the exact same formulation that appears in this text in relation to the twelve links is repeated with regard to the five aggregates in a text that bears the same name, at SN III.163–164.

and at the moment of liberation. Indeed, this is the most intuitive understanding of Buddhist praxis – liberation is attained through a full interiorization of the Buddhist view of reality.

More support for the gradual approach, according to which the concepts that guided the student's practice are internalized so that they will structure his liberating experiences, comes from the AN's *Ummagga-sutta*:

> Here, monk, a monk has heard "this is suffering," and having penetrated the meaning of this through wisdom, he sees it. He has heard "this is the arising of suffering," and having penetrated the meaning of this through wisdom, he sees it. He has heard "this is cessation of suffering," and having penetrated the meaning of this through wisdom, he sees it. He has heard "this is the path the leads to the cessation of suffering," and having penetrated the meaning of this through wisdom, he sees it. In this way, monk, one has learned (*sutavā*) and has penetrating wisdom.[39]

First one hears the method of the four observations, and later one sees accordingly after "having penetrated them through wisdom."

A final example is the *Mahānāmasakka-sutta*. In this text Ānanda responds to a question posed by Mahānāma Sakka: which precedes – *samādhi* or wisdom? Ānanda answers that the Buddha has taught morality, concentration, and wisdom that pertain to the levels of both training (*sekha*) and beyond training (*asekha*). Ānanda proceeds to define (1) morality as living restrained by the *Pātimokkha*, (2) concentration as the cultivation of the four *jhānas*, and (3) wisdom as knowing the original formula of the 4NTs. He then explains how these three aspects of the path transcend the level of training:

> This disciple of the noble ones, Mahānāma, who has thus perfected morality, perfected concentration and perfected wisdom, following the destruction of the inflows, abides after having realized through direct knowledge and seeing the *dhamma* with his own very eyes and having entered into the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are devoid of the inflows.[40]

[39] AN 6.186: *Idha, bhikkhu, bhikkhuno 'idaṃ dukkhant'i sutaṃ hoti paññāya cassa atthaṃ ativijjha passati; 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti sutaṃ hoti paññāya cassa atthaṃ ativijjha passati; 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti sutaṃ hoti paññāya cassa atthaṃ ativijjha passati; 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti sutaṃ hoti paññāya cassa atthaṃ ativijjha passati. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhu, sutavā nibbedhikapañño hotīti.*

[40] AN 3.74: *Sa kho so, mahānāma, ariyasāvako evaṃ sīlasampanno evaṃ samādhisampanno evaṃ paññāsampanno āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati.*

The text is scant in information regarding the way training actually effects liberation, but we understand that training and liberation rely on the same elements, only that in liberation they reach a consummation that allows them to produce their full possible impact. After one perfects morality, *jhāna* and the seeing of the four truths, she may approach liberation. This passage also resonates with the "autobiographical" descriptions of the Buddha's awakening discussed in the first chapter, which rely on two elements described by Ānanda to Mahānāma – the concentration of the four *jhānas* and the wisdom of the four truths. The logic of these descriptions is now beginning to crystallize: in *samādhi* meditation the practitioner effects the destruction of the inflows through observing reality with the wisdom he has cultivated and grown accustomed to – he sees the inflows as suffering and is released from their determining influence by perceiving their arising and cessation with correct subjective attitude. The four observations are a scheme used for reflection on the contents of awareness and on the manner in which they arise and cease. This scheme is to be practiced until a deep and powerful acquaintance matures. At this level, liberation is in sight.

We understand that any object may be observed through the concepts of the four truths. This fourfold method of observation is most commonly employed in the early discourses in the analysis of dependent-origination, primarily as a way to regard the twelve links,[41] but many other terms are subjected to the same analysis. An interesting example comes from the *Samādhi-sutta*, which opens the *Vedanā-saṃyutta*, in which three types of feelings (*vedanā*) are defined – pleasant, painful, and neither pleasant nor painful. Then the following verse appears:

> The disciple of the Buddha
> who has entered *samādhi* and is aware and mindful
> knows feelings, the arising (*saṃbhava*) of feelings,
> the place where they cease and the path the leads to their destruction.
> Following the destruction of feelings,
> a monk is quieted, stilled.[42]

We see again that the "suffering" of the four truths can be replaced by other Buddhist concepts. Indeed, a wide range of Buddhist categories of

[41] See for example in the *Ñāṇāvatthu-sutta* at SN II.57–58, the *Parivīmaṃsana-sutta* at SN II.80–82 (both are discussed below), and the *Sammasa-sutta* at SN II.107–108. This form of analysis of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* according to the four truths is also central to the *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta* of the MN.

[42] SN IV.204: *Samāhito sampajāno, sato buddhassa sāvako; vedanā ca pajānāti, vedanāna ca sambhavaṃ. Yattha cetā nirujjhanti, maggañca khayagāminaṃ; vedanānaṃ khayā bhikkhu, nicchāto parinibbut'ti.*

analysis can serve as the focus of the method of reflection expressed by the four truths, such as the five aggregates, views (*diṭṭhi*), "burning material" (*upadhi*), or "identity" (*sakkāya*).[43] In this last text, we also find that the concepts that represent the other "truths" are again replaced by synonymous expressions – *saṃbhava*, rather than *samudaya*, for the "arising" of feelings, for "cessation" we have " (and) the place where they cease" (*yattha cetā nirujjhanti*), and *maggañ khayagāminaṃ* replaces *dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā* as "the path that leads to (their) destruction/cessation." We again see that the method of observation is primary to the specific terms used to express it.

Interestingly, this method of observation contributes to other common formulas as well. One important example is the following, quoted here from the *Vedanā-saṃyutta*'s *Ānanda-sutta*. In this text, Ānanda approaches the Buddha with the following question: "Sir, which feelings are there? Which is the arising of feelings? Which is the cessation of feelings? Which is the path that leads to the cessation of feelings? Which is the enjoyment of feelings? Which is the danger of feelings? Which is the escape from feelings?"[44] To the four elements of the four truths, three more are appended: the enjoyment (*assāda*), danger (*ādīnava*), and escape (*nissaraṇa*) in relation to feelings. This list of seven elements is clearly based on the four observations but adds further concepts in order to systematize reflection. The Buddha's answers are thus:

> There are three feelings, Ānanda pleasant, painful and neither pleasant nor painful. These, Ānanda, are said to be feelings. Following the arising of contact, there is the arising of feelings; following the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of feelings. This precisely is the noble eightfold path that is the way to the cessation of feelings, that is right view . . . right

[43] For example, the method of observation of the four truths is applied to the aggregates at SN III.163 and at SN III.176–177; to "views" (*diṭṭhi*) and to "remorse" (*vippaṭisāra*) at AN 7.54; to "burning material" (*upadhi*) at SN II.108; to "feelings" (*vedanā*) at SN IV.235; to "identity" (*sakkāya*), at AN 4.33 (see also the expanded presentation at MN I.299 and the interesting variation at MN III.284). There are also instances where the text does not adhere precisely to the formula of the four truths, but that the statement is effectively equal; see for instance in the *Avijjāpañhā-sutta* at SN IV.256.

It should be noted as well that the wording of the original formula of the 4NTs can also be applied to contexts that are removed from meditative cultivation. This is evidenced by the *Ubbāhikā-sutta* (AN 10.33), in which the last of the ten qualities possessed by the monk who is authorized to decide on the expulsion of another monk, is that "he is skillful in the appeasement of arisen disputes: He knows the disputes; he knows the arising of disputes; he knows the cessation of disputes; he knows the path that leads to the cessation of disputes." (*adhikaraṇasamuppādavūpasamakusalo hoti – adhikaraṇaṃ jānāti; adhikaraṇasamudayaṃ jānāti; adhikaraṇanirodhaṃ jānāti; adhikaraṇanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ jānāti.*)

[44] SN IV.219–220: *Katamā nu kho, bhante, vedanā, katamo vedanāsamudayo, katamo vedanānirodho, katamā vedanānirodhagāminī paṭipadā? Ko vedanāya assādo, ko ādīnavo, kiṃ nissaraṇanti?*

> concentration. The pleasure and well being that arises dependent on feel ings is the enjoyment of feelings. Those impermanent, painful and changing sensations are the danger of feelings. The driving away and abandoning of will and desire toward feelings is the escape from feelings.[45]

Very little substantial content is added with these extra three elements; the new terms are not particularly important for our concerns in themselves. It is, however, interesting that there exists another form of analysis in the Nikāyas that follows closely upon the heels of the four observations. In fact, we can see that the formula of the four truths is at the heart of other schemes of analysis that are recommended in the Nikāyas as well.[46] Another related example, which would normally be seen as being related to the doctrine of selflessness, is quoted here from the *Vāsijaṭa-sutta* of the *Khandha-saṃyutta* (SN III.152–53):

> I say, monks, that the destruction of the inflows occurs to one who knows and sees and not to one who does not know and does not see. And what does he know, monks, what does he see so that the destruction of the inflows occurs to him? "Form," "arising of form," "passing away of form"; "feelings," "arising of feelings," "passing away of feelings"; "perceptions," "arising of perceptions," "passing away of perceptions"; "formations," "arising of formations," "passing away of formations"; "consciousness," "arising of consciousness," "passing away of consciousness." To him who knows and sees in this way, monks, the destruction of the inflows occurs.[47]

This is another recurrent formulation in the Nikāyas, which relates a liberating insight that involves a perception of concrete experiences, together with their arising and cessation. Here, the liberating effect is brought about by identifying the five aggregates and observing their coming into and out of being. In fact this text is a replica of the

[45] SN IV.220 *Tisso imā, ānanda, vedanā – sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā, adukkhamasukhā vedanā – imā vuccanti, ānanda, vedanā. Phassasamudayā vedanāsamudayo; phassanirodhā vedanānirodho. Ayam eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo vedanānirodhagāminī paṭipadā seyyathidaṃ – sammādiṭṭhi. . .pe. . . sammāsamādhi. Yaṃ vedanaṃ paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ vedanāya assādo. Yā vedanā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā, ayaṃ vedanāya ādīnavo. Yo vedanāya chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ vedanāya nissaraṇaṃ.*

[46] For another such expansion of the fourfold method of observation of the four truths, see the unique *Nibbhedika-sutta* (AN 6.63). This text observes the concepts of the passions (*kāmā*), feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), inflows (*āsavā*), action (*kamma*), and suffering (*dukkha*), saying that the they are to be known (*veditabba*), as is "the arising of their conditions" (*nidānasaṃbhava*), their distinctions (*vemattatā*), maturation (*vipāko*), cessation (*nirodha*), and "the path that leads to their cessation" (*X-nirodhagāminī paṭipadā*).

[47] *Jānato ahaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayaṃ vadāmi, no ajānato no apassato. Kiñ ca, bhikkhave, jānato kiṃ passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti? 'Iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo; iti vedanā. . . iti saññā. . . iti saṅkhārā. . . iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo'ti – evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, jānato evaṃ passato āsavānaṃ khayo hoti.*

Āsavakkhaya-sutta we read at the beginning of the section, only that it replaces the observation of the four truths with the observation of the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates as what causes the liberating event of the destruction of inflows. The present formula has much in common with the one of the four truths: in place of the latter's *idaṃ/ayaṃ* – "this" – we have an *iti*, which could also be translated as "this" but is here marked by quotation marks; both formulations employ the concept of *samudaya* for "arising," but here *nirodha* – "cessation" – of the four truths is replaced by *atthaṅgama*, "passing away" (or more literally "going away"). The insights are similar;[48] the main difference being the omission of the fourth truth from the last formula.

This last passage, which emphasizes the *samudaya* and *atthaṅgama* of the aggregates, highlights the role of the concrete perception regarding the arising and cessation of events in catalyzing liberation. Numerous texts and insights are seen to revolve around this same perception. A last, remarkable example we will look at is the definition of the "faculty of wisdom" (*paññindriya*) in the *Dutiyavibhaṅga-sutta*:

> And what, bhikkhus, is the faculty of wisdom? Here, bhikkhus, the noble disciple is wise; he possesses wisdom directed to arising and passing away, which is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering. He knows truly "this is suffering." He knows truly "this is the arising of suffering." He knows truly: "this is the cessation of suffering." He knows truly: "this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering." This is called the faculty of wisdom.[49]

Through "wisdom directed to arising and passing away" (*udayatthagāminiyā paññāya*), suffering is brought to an end. This form, or "faculty" (*indriya*), of wisdom is equal to the correct knowledge of the four truths. The four observations appear to be closely connected to a perception of impermanence.

Numerous additional examples regarding the functioning of the formula of the four observations as a method of reflection on concrete, present objects of consciousness will be quoted and discussed in following sections

[48] See also the quote from the *Udāyī-sutta* below, p. 211.

[49] Translated by Bodhi (2000: 1673). SN V.199: *Katamañ ca, bhikkhave, paññindriyaṃ? Idha, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako paññavā hoti udayatthagāminiyā paññāya samannāgato ariyāya nibbedhikāya, sammā dukkhakkhayagāminiyā. So 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti – idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, paññindriyaṃ.*

Bodhi translates the enigmatic *udayatthagāminiyā paññāya* as "wisdom directed to arising and passing away" following the gloss in the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, which explains *udayatthagāminiyā* as *udayabbayapariggahikāya*. See note 195 on p. 1931 in Bodhi (2000).

of this chapter. A particularly important example will be a passage from the *Titthāyatanādi-sutta*, which states explicitly that the four observations are applied to current feelings. We now move on to discuss the relationship between the four observations and the doctrines of dependent-origination and selflessness since this will afford a more complete grasp of this philosophical *and* meditative method of contemplation that was apparently of great importance to early Buddhism. The comparison between the formulas that are at the base of these three doctrines allows us to zoom in on a specific meditative observation that is at the base of these seminal doctrines of Buddhist philosophy. The concrete insight into the reality of impermanence is at the root of all three teachings; all rely on one fundamental, meditative observation regarding the arising and cessation of specific contents of experience.

4.2 The four truths and dependent-origination

A number of the texts quoted in the previous section exhibit a close relationship between the concepts and ideas behind the four truths and dependent-origination. The clearest example is when the four observations are applied to the twelve links. Another case is the *Ānanda-sutta*,[50] which introduced the observation of seven elements – the four truths together with the concepts of the enjoyment, danger, and escape. This text first identifies "these feelings" as an expression of suffering. It then uses the language of dependent-origination in place of the second and third elements of the arising and cessation of suffering – the Buddha says: "following the arising of contact, there is the arising of feelings; following the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of feelings" (*phassasamudayā vedanāsamudayo; phassanirodhā vedanānirodho*). This statement is remarkably close to the way that the Buddha introduces the move from links 6 to 7 in the formula of the twelve links: "depending on contact, feelings (arise)" (*phassapaccayā vedanā* [*sambhavanti*]). The statement here also should remind us of the abstract formula of dependent-origination – "following the arising of this, that arises" (*imass' uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati*). Then the text refers to the fourth truth of the path according to the method of the four truths. In this text, as in others we will soon examine, the two doctrines are thoroughly intertwined.

Indeed, when we look at the four observations next to the abstract formula of dependent-origination, we see that they have much in common:

50 See p. 155.

The four truths:

> This is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.
> *idaṃ dukkhaṃ, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā*

Dependent origination:

> When this is, that is. Following the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, that is not. Following the cessation of this, that ceases.
> *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati.*
> *imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhaṃ idaṃ nirujjhati*

If we were to highlight the shared features of the two formulas, almost nothing would be left unmarked. Both doctrines involve a reflection on the arising and cessation of "this." We should also recall in this context the Buddha's revelation regarding the reality of dependent-origination, which focuses on arising and cessation: "'arising (*samudayo*), arising' . . . 'cessation (*nirodho*), cessation,' thus, monks, in regard to things unheard of previously there arose for me the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the understanding, the insight." This insight underscores the centrality of the concrete perception of arising and cessation to the notion of dependent-origination. We may also remind ourselves of the parallel concept to *paṭiccasamuppāda* – *idappaccayatā*, "being dependent *on this*." Here we find more than an echo of the focus on "this" current object of observation in the original formula of the 4NTs. The main difference between the two formulas is that the one of the four truths contains the fourth truth, which has no representation in the articulation of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Furthermore, the formula of the four truths centers on the concept of "suffering," which is not mentioned explicitly in the abstract formula of dependent-origination. In the standard presentation of the twelve links, however, which normally accompanies this formula, it is said that "this is the arising/cessation of this whole mass of suffering" (*evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo/nirodho hoti*).

Although I believe that the fundamental connection between these teachings – perhaps even their underlying identity – is evident when looked at in this way, it would be valuable to discuss a number of the texts that make the connection between the two doctrines more explicit. One such text is the *Ñāṇavatthu-sutta* of the NS,[51] which describes "44 aspects of knowledge" by repeating the elements of the four truths with regard to links

[51] "The discourse on the aspects of knowledge" at SN II.56–59.

2–12 of the twelve links (for example, "the knowledge of old age and death/of the arising of old age and death/of the cessation of old age and death/of the path that leads to the cessation of old age and death").[52] Then the Buddha describes the four observations in a way that is modeled on the abstract formula of dependent-origination. The Buddha describes each of the links and says (using here old age and death as an example):

> This is old age, and this is death. *This* is said, monks, to be old age and death; following the arising of birth, there is the *arising* of old age and death; following the cessation of birth, there is the *cessation* of old age and death; *This* precisely is the noble eightfold way that is the *path* that leads to the cessation of old age and death, that is right view . . . right *samādhi*.[53]

This passage uses the four truths in order to reflect on processes classified as "dependent-origination." More importantly, it combines expressions that are normally part of the four truths formula *or* the language of dependent-origination; the first "this" and "the path" at the end of the passage come from the formula of the four truths, but here the second and third truths are replaced by the logic of dependent-origination. Thus, this text, like the *Ānanda-sutta*, views these doctrines as interrelated and as relying on a similar method of analysis.

A similar example appears in the *Parivīmaṃsana-sutta*.[54] Once again I take old age and death as an example of a statement that is made regarding links 2 to 12:

> Here, monks, a monk who is thoroughly analyzing, examines this varie gated and complicated form of suffering, that is aging and death, which arises in the world: this suffering what is its condition (*nidāna*), from what is its arising (*samudaya*), from what is it born (*jāti*), from what does it emerge (*pabhava*)? When what exists is there old age and death? When what does not exist is there no old age and death?
>
> Thoroughly examining in this way, he knows this manifold and compli cated form of suffering, aging and death, which arises in the world: "this suffering has birth as its condition, it arises from birth, is born form birth and comes forth from birth. When there is birth, there is old age and death. When there is no birth, there is no old age and death. He knows old age

[52] SN II.57: *Jarāmaraṇe ñāṇaṃ, jarāmaraṇasamudaye ñāṇaṃ, jarāmaraṇanirodhe ñāṇaṃ, jarāmaraṇanirodhagāminiyā paṭipadāya ñāṇaṃ*. The first link of ignorance is excluded, presumably since the text relies on the regular formula of the twelve links and thus has no way to speak of the causes of the arising of the first link.

[53] SN II.57: *Iti ayañ ca jarā, idañ ca maraṇaṃ; idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, jarāmaraṇaṃ. Jātisamudayā jarāmaraṇasamudayo; jātinirodhā jarāmaraṇanirodho; ayam eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo jarāmaraṇanirodhagāminī paṭipadā, seyyathidaṃ – sammādiṭṭhi. . .pe. . . sammāsamādhi*.

[54] "The discourse on thorough analysis" at SN II.80–84.

> and death; he knows the arising of old age and death; he knows the cessation of old age and death, and he knows the path which leads to the cessation of old age and death. Practicing in this way he acts accordingly. This is called, monks, a monk who completely and correctly practices toward the destruction of suffering, toward the destruction of old age and death.[55]

Note the easy passage from what we normally see as the doctrine of dependent-origination to the concepts of the four truths; according to this text, these two principles are complementary and represent aspects of one and the same reflection. The practitioner first observes the conditions that give rise to old age and death, that is to suffering; he then sees that "when there is birth, there is old age and death; when there is no birth, there is no old age and death," an observation that is structured according to the abstract formulation of dependent-origination. Next, he sees old age and death according to the formula of the four truths. These observations are clearly related to each other and must be seen as part of one integrated method of analysis. Moreover, it is said that the monk who examines in this way is examining in the continuous present – he is a *parivīmaṃsamāno*, "an analyzer" who carries out his examination with regard to the present contents of his experience.

A unique, particularly instructing text is the *Titthāyatanādi-sutta* of the AN, which supplies an idiosyncratic definition of the 4NTs. I quote from this text at some length so we may fully appreciate its significance. The most important part is the first section of the Buddha's response, which is probably the oldest layer of the text:

> These four noble truths, monks, are the *dhamma* taught by me that is not rebuked, not found fault with, not blamed or spoken against by wise men, Brahmins and ascetics. Regarding what was this said?
>
> Well, monks, relying on the elements, there is entry into the womb. Entry having taken place, there is name and form depending on name and form, there are the six bases; depending on the six bases, contact; depending

[55] SN II.81: *Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu parivīmaṃsamāno parivīmaṃsati – 'yaṃ kho idaṃ anekavidhaṃ nānappakārakaṃ dukkhaṃ loke uppajjati jarāmaraṇaṃ; idaṃ nu kho dukkhaṃ kiṃnidānaṃ kiṃsamudayaṃ kiṃjātikaṃ kiṃpabhavaṃ? Kismiṃ sati jarāmaraṇaṃ hoti, kismiṃ asati jarāmaraṇaṃ na hotī'ti? So parivīmaṃsamāno evaṃ pajānāti – 'yaṃ kho idaṃ anekavidhaṃ nānappakārakaṃ dukkhaṃ loke uppajjati jarāmaraṇaṃ, idaṃ kho dukkhaṃ jātinidānaṃ jātisamudayaṃ jātijātikaṃ jātippabhavaṃ. Jātiyā sati jarāmaraṇaṃ hoti, jātiyā asati jarāmaraṇaṃ na hotī'ti. So jarāmaraṇañ ca pajānāti, jarāmaraṇasamudayañ ca pajānāti, jarāmaraṇanirodhañ ca pajānāti, yā ca jarāmaraṇanirodhasāruppagāminī paṭipadā tañ ca pajānāti, tathā paṭipanno ca hoti anudhammacārī; ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sabbaso sammā dukkhakkhayāya paṭipanno jarāmaraṇanirodhāya.*

on contact, feeling. Regarding something presently felt (*vediyamāna*), monks, I make known "this is suffering," I make known "this is the origin of suffering," I make known "this is the cessation of suffering," I make known "this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering."

And which, monks, is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering. . . . In short, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. This, I say, monks, is the noble truth of suffering.

And which, monks, is the noble truth of the arising of suffering?[56] Dependent on ignorance, monks, mental formations arise . . . dependent on birth, arise old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery. This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, I explain as the noble truth of the arising of suffering.

And which, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? Following the complete and passionless cessation of that very ignorance, the cessation of mental dispositions . . . following the cessation of birth, old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery cease. This is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, I explain as the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

And which, monks, is the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering? This is the noble eightfold way, which is right view . . . right concentration. This, monks, is the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. Regarding this, monks, it was said "these four noble truths, monks, are the *dhamma* taught by me that are not rebuked, not found fault with, not blamed or spoken against by wise men, Brahmins and ascetics."[57]

[56] Note the variant reading that has been preserved – *dukkhasamdukkhanirodho/dukkhanirodho ariyasaccaṃ*, instead of the apparently later *dukkhasamudayaṃ/dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ*. For the significance of this variation see the discussion of Norman (1982) at the beginning of this chapter.

[57] AN 3.62: *Imāni cattāri ariyasaccānīti, bhikkhave, mayā dhammo desito aniggahito asaṃkiliṭṭho anupavajjo appaṭikuṭṭho samaṇehi brāhmaṇehi viññūhīti. Iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. Kiñ cetaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ? Channaṃ, bhikkhave, dhātūnaṃ upādāya gabbhassāvakkanti hoti; okkantiyā sati nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā. Vediyamānassa kho panāhaṃ, bhikkhave,' idaṃ dukkhan'ti paññapemi, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti paññapemi, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti paññapemi, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti paññapemi.*

Katamañ ca, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Jātipi dukkhā . . . Saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā. Idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ. Katamañ ca, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā . . . jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ. Katamañ ca, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Avijjāya tv eva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho, . . . jātinirodhā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. Idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ. Katamañ ca, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ? Ayam eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ – sammādiṭṭhi . . . sammāsamādhi. Idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ. 'Imāni cattāri ariyasaccānī'ti, bhikkhave, mayā dhammo desito aniggahito asaṃkiliṭṭho anupavajjo appaṭikuṭṭho samaṇehi brāhmaṇehi viññūhīti. Iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ idametaṃ paṭicca vuttanti.

This text, which employs the concept of the four *noble* truths, is of interest for two main reasons. First, the first paragraph presents a non-standard explication of the four observations that corroborates much of what I have been saying in this chapter; it explains that the formula of the four observations applies to "something presently felt" – the term *vediyamāna* is a present passive participle that refers to an object that is experienced in the present. We see that the observation of the four truths offers a grid for the correct perception of objects, specifically feelings, as they arise. This passage appears not to have suffered from any doctrinal intervention as there is no one equal to it in the canon.

Second, this text emphasizes the connection between the doctrines of the four (noble) truths and of dependent-origination. In the first paragraph, the Buddha uses the original formula of the four truths in order to reflect on a process of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The four observations are applied at an interesting place in the human reality of conditionality – after an embryo develops in the womb, his senses mature, and then feelings, the first conscious experience, arise; the four observations are the correct way of regarding these feelings. Later, the connection between the two doctrines – or better, between the two methods of analysis, is strengthened when the standardized presentation of the twelve links is employed in order to explain the second and third noble truths. Here, the *Titthāyatanādi-sutta*'s use of the twelve links as an explanation of the second and third noble truths should be distinguished from the popular notion that the twelve links are a detailed description of the second and third NTs. Commonly, one encounters the claim the twelve links explain that ignorance is the ultimate cause of desire, which is the cause of suffering according to the second noble truth.[58] But here, a different understanding is conveyed – the twelve links *are* the second and third NTs; they do not appear here in order to explain the causes of desire but spell out the processes of arising and cessation of suffering themselves. The question is not what the cause of desire is but how the arising of suffering occurs, and the answer is given through an exposition of the twelve links. Likewise, the cessation of suffering is explained through the backward process of dependent-cessation.

We again identify a close connection between the insights of the four truths and of dependent-origination, which appear in our analysis as methods of observation, rather than philosophical doctrines. Let us now see how the teaching of selflessness connects to this picture.

[58] E.g. Rahula (1974 [1959: 29), Harris (1991: 138–146).

4.3 The four truths and selflessness

The highlighting of the concept of *vediyamāna* – what is presently felt – by the *Titthāyatanādi-sutta* as the focal point of the observation of the four truths resonates with the claim made in certain discourses – *yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ*, "all that is felt is (included) in suffering."[59] This upsetting statement on the ubiquitous nature of suffering is an obvious counterpart of the more familiar – *yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*, "all that is of the nature of arising, is of the nature of ceasing," which emphasizes the reality of impermanence and which is often connected to the attainment of the "eye of truth" (*dhammacakkhu*) or to the stage of "stream-entry" (*sotāpanna*). This last statement captures the fundamental notions of arising (*samudaya*) and ceasing (*nirodha*) that we have seen to be at the base of the textual presentations of the four truths and of dependent-origination.

As described in Chapter 2, the central argument for *anatta* is that what is impermanent and painful cannot be the self. These two potent expressions thus give voice to a realization that is at the base of the three doctrines of *anatta*, the four truths, and dependent-origination. As we saw, both of these last two doctrines revolve around the notions of *samudaya* and *nirodha* and analyze the different "*this*es" of awareness in terms of the causes that give rise to them and that bring them to their end. Given that the truth of impermanence serves as the main argument for the doctrine of selflessness, it should not surprise us that the active perception of arising and cessation is fundamental to this doctrine as well. It will be suggested here that the full realization of selflessness also emerges from an apprehension of a similar perception regarding the arising and cessation of specific, primarily mental, events.[60]

Earlier we examined the *Vāsijaṭa-sutta*'s use of the concepts of *samudaya* and *atthaṅgama*, arising and passing away, in order to reflect on the nature of the aggregates and to stimulate the destruction of the inflows.[61] This same understanding is repeated in other texts as well.[62] In other cases, a perception of the aggregates, their arising, and their passing away is

[59] SN II.53; SN IV.216.

[60] Anālayo (2003: 102–107) emphasizes the concrete perception of impermanence as being at the base of the realization of selflessness and as a key to changing one's perceptual and emotive tendencies.

[61] See page 156.

[62] See other examples for the connection between the vision of *samudaya/atthaṅgama* and liberation at SN II.29; DN II.35; AN 4.41.

explicitly said to trigger the attitude of selflessness. A vivid example is the aptly titled "the discourse on the perception of impermanence":

> And how, monks, are perceptions of impermanence cultivated and strengthened, so that they destroy all lust for passions, destroy all lust for form, destroy all lust for states of being, destroy all ignorance and abolish all of the conceit "I am"? "Form," "arising of form," "passing away of form" . . . "feelings" . . . "perceptions" . . . "formations" . . . "consciousness," "arising of consciousness," "passing away of consciousness." In this way, monks, per ceptions of impermanence are cultivated and strengthened, so that they destroy all lust . . .[63]

The perception of impermanence in the aggregates allows for the full psychological assimilation of selflessness; this is achieved through the annihilation of the notion "I am" (*asmi*). A parallel statement comes from the *Mahāsuññata-sutta* ("The great discourse on emptiness"):

> Ānanda, there are these five aggregates of clinging, in regard to which a monk should abide observing rising (*udaya*) and ceasing (*baya*): "form," 'arising (*samudaya*) of form," "passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of form" . . . "passing away of consciousness." For him who abides observing the rising and ceasing in these five aggregates of clinging, the conceit "I am" diminishes.[64]

Impermanence here is not an argument in favor of *anatta* but a direct perception of its reality. Many additional texts show that the fruition of the realization of selflessness relates to a concrete perception of arising and passing away.[65] Note, once again, that the basic understanding is expressed through different terms; here we find "rising and ceasing," *udaya* and *baya (*skt *vyaya).*

[63] This is the *Aniccasaññā-sutta* (SN III.155–157): *Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca, bhikkhave, aniccasaññā kathaṃ bahulīkatā sabbaṃ kāmarāgaṃ pariyādiyati sabbaṃ rūparāgaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ bhavarāgaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ avijjaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ asmimānaṃ samūhanati? 'Iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo; iti vedanā... iti saññā... iti saṅkhārā... iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo'ti – evaṃ bhāvitā kho, bhikkhave, aniccasaññā evaṃ bahulīkatā sabbaṃ kāmarāgaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ rūparāgaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ bhavarāgaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ avijjaṃ pariyādiyati, sabbaṃ asmimānaṃ samūhanatīti.*

[64] MN III.114–115: *Pañca kho ime, ānanda, upādānakkhandhā yattha bhikkhunā udayabbayānupassinā vihātabbaṃ – 'iti rūpaṃ iti rūpassa samudayo iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo, iti vedanā... iti saññā... iti saṅkhārā... iti viññāṇaṃ iti viññāṇassa samudayo iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo'ti. Tassa imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassino viharato yo pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu asmimāno so pahīyati.*

[65] See, for example, in the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta* (MN 72, at MN I.486, discussed in section 2.1), where after describing the same perception regarding the arising and passing away of the aggregates, the Buddha says: "following the destruction of, dispassion toward, cessation, abandoning, giving up and not taking hold of all thoughts, of all mentations, of all underlying tendencies to I and mine, the Tathāgata, I say, is liberated" (*tasmā tathāgato sabbamaññitānaṃ sabbamathitānaṃ sabbāhaṃkāramamaṃkāramānānusayānaṃ khayā virāgā nirodhā cāgā paṭinissaggā anupādā vimuttoti vadāmī*).

An interesting variation on this theme is found in the *Khemaka-sutta* and the *Channa-sutta*, which appear together in the middle of the SN's *Khandha-saṃyutta*.[66] Both these texts relate stories of monks who possess a clear comprehension of the doctrine of selflessness but who still do not consider themselves liberated since they have yet to experience full realization. The first of these texts is particularly illuminating – the monk Khemaka is sick,[67] and the elders (*therā*) send a monk named Dāsaka to inquire after his health. Khemaka sends Dāsaka back with the message that he is not getting any better and that he still suffers great pain. The elders now send Dāsaka back with the insensitive-enough query whether Khemaka "sees the five aggregates as the self or as belonging to the self."[68] Khemaka is apparently more advanced than his companions and replies in a manner that they do not understand, saying that:

> "I do not see a self or something belonging to the self in regard to these five aggregates of clinging. Still, I am not an arahant whose inflows are destroyed. Even though, in regard to these five aggregates of clinging, the notion 'I am' is still found in me, I do not see them as 'this I am.'"[69]

Unlike the elders, Khemaka can distinguish between the theoretical understanding of the teaching and its complete, embodied application. The elders are puzzled and order Dāsaka to return to further question Khemaka on the matter. Khemaka, by now apparently somewhat exacerbated by the elders' persistence, asks for his cane and sets out to speak with them in-person. He then explains that he does not say "I am" in relation to each of the aggregates or to anything other than the aggregates. He offers the simile of the scent of a flower, which cannot be said to arise from any of its parts; the point appears to be that there is a more subtle level of analysis then the initial dissecting of the flower to the petals, the stem, etc., or the breaking up of the self into the aggregates. Khemaka then elucidates his intention:

[66] These are discourses 89 and 90 of the *Khandha-saṃyutta*, at SN III.126–132 and III.132–135, respectively.

[67] There is an interesting connection between this discourse and another *Channa-sutta* (MN 146), which transmits a similar teaching to the one of the *Khemaka-sutta* and also speaks of the relevance of the teaching of selflessness to one who is sick or dying. This relationship is strengthened by the position of a *Channa-sutta* of the SN immediately after the *Khemaka-sutta*.

[68] One wonders if this part of the story is not meant to be a joke. It resonates with the humorous applications of Buddhist doctrine discussed by Schopen (2007). See especially Upananda's "teaching" of impermanence on page 205.

[69] SN III.128: *Imesu khvāhaṃ, āvuso, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu na kiñci attaṃ vā attaniyaṃ vā samanupassāmi, na camhi arahaṃ khīṇāsavo; api ca me, āvuso, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu 'asmī'ti adhigataṃ 'ayam aham asmī'ti na ca samanupassāmīti*

> Even, friends, if the five lower obstacles (*saṃyojana*) have been abandoned by a disciple of the noble ones, there still remains, in relation to the five aggregates of clinging, an underlying conceit 'I am,' a desire 'I am,' an underlying inclination 'I am.'

Not only is a theoretical grasp of the doctrine only a start, there are levels of realization. At earlier stages there still remains underlying, unconscious and emotional positions that continue to rely on the notion of a self even though it has been refuted philosophically. With further meditative practice, further advancement may be expected as Khemaka continues to explain:

> Then, at another time, he abides observing rising and ceasing in the five aggregates of clinging: "form," "arising of form," "passing away of form" . . . "passing away of consciousness." For him who abides observing rising and ceasing in these five aggregates of clinging, also the lingering conceit "I am," the desire "I am" and the underlying inclination "I am," are uprooted.[70]

The concrete, intense observation of the arising and passing away of the aggregates is what brings about the uprooting of the subconscious inclinations that continue grasping at a self. Khemaka then concludes by offering the simile of a cloth that retains a dim scent of the materials used to cleanse it with. There are levels of realization, he hints, in which the notion "I am" still functions, even though the disciple has fully comprehended the fact that there is no self in the aggregates intellectually.

For our concerns, what is most significant in this passage is that a perception that is similar to the one that is at the root of the doctrines of the four truths and of dependent-origination leads Khemaka to a full psychological realization of the doctrine of selflessness. When one sees "'form,' 'arising of form,' 'passing away of form,' etc.," one peels away the innermost levels of the grasping at a self.[71] Although a monk may have an initial conceptual understanding of the teaching of selflessness, it is the *direct seeing* of the rise and fall of the aggregates that brings one to a full absorption of its impact. As we saw, an act of seeing the phenomenological realities of impermanence provides the structure for the teachings of the four truths and of dependent-origination as well.

[70] SN III.130–131: *Kiñ cāpi, āvuso, ariyasāvakassa pañcorambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni pahīnāni bhavanti, atha khvassa hoti – 'yo ca pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu anusahagato asmīti māno, asmīti chando, asmīti anusayo asamūhato. So aparena samayena pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassī viharati – iti rūpaṃ, iti rūpassa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo; iti vedanā... iti saññā... iti saṅkhārā... iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo'ti. Tassimesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassino viharato yopissa hoti pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu anusahagato 'asmī'ti māno 'asmī'ti chando 'asmī'ti anusayo asamūhato sopi samugghātaṃ gacchati.*

[71] Technically, the text speaks of transcending "the five lower obstacles" (*pañcorambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni*).

This connection between the three doctrines is further highlighted in the *Channa-sutta* in which the monk Channa, in a similar way to Khemaka, understands that the five aggregates, indeed all phenomena, are impermanent and not-the-self. Channa knows *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe dhammā anattā* – "all conditioned elements are impermanent, all things are not-the-self" – but his mind does not settle down and relieve itself of its need for a self. Channa then turns to Ānanda, who teaches him the *Kaccānagotta-sutta*, a seminal teaching on the doctrine of dependent-origination, which relieves his doubts. Here dependent-origination allows Channa to realize selflessness.

In the first chapter of this study, we observed that there are many theories of liberation in the Nikāyas, a fact that has led some scholars to doubt the reliability of the textual descriptions of liberation. Surely, we will not be able to reconcile all of the different theories, but the analysis of the concrete observations that are at the heart of the different philosophical doctrines has the power to clear much of the obscurity and to point out a fundamental coherence between the texts. We understand that what should probably be considered the three most fundamental Buddhist philosophical doctrines of early Buddhism – the 4NTs, dependent-origination and selflessness – all relate to a perception of the arising and cessation of the present contents of experience, which are observed through the concepts favored by each doctrine; suffering is central to the 4NTs, the aggregates to *anatta*, notions of conditioning to dependent-origination. We could call this a perception of "impermanence," but not in a theoretical sense since this is a direct observation of the processes of arising and cessation from which the philosophical concept of impermanence is gleaned. I would suggest that the natural context for this observation is concentrated meditation although it can apply to non-meditative experiences as well. The different philosophical doctrines express the continued and enhanced reflection on the aspects of this core set of experiences.

The close connection between the three doctrines is emphasized by a comparison of the last passages quoted, which demonstrated that the perception of the arising and passing away of the aggregates appeases the most subtle notions of "I am", with other texts that connect this same observation to the teachings of the four truths and of dependent-origination. For example, the *Dasabala-sutta* of the NS explicates how "the Tathāgata, who possesses the ten knowledges and four forms of confidence, claims the place of a bull, roars the lion's roar in the assemblies and rolls the wheel of brahma (*brahmacakka*)":

> "Form," "arising of form," "passing away of form" ... "passing away of consciousness." When this is, that is. Following the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, that is not. Following the cessation of this, that ceases. That is, dependent on ignorance, (mental) formations arise. Dependent on (mental) formations, consciousness. ... This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, I say is dependent origination. Following the complete passionless cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of (mental) formations. ... This is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.[72]

The Buddha's "lion's roar" consists of a perception of the arising and passing away of the aggregates, normally connected to an insight of selflessness, which is said here to be equal to, or to immediately lead to, an apprehension of the abstract principle of dependent-origination and to the twelve links. Indeed, the notion of dependent-origination is a natural counterpart to impermanence as it points out a constitutive aspect of the ephemeral movement of experience – arising and passing away are determined by causal factors.

According to the *Udāyī-sutta*, the perception of the arising and passing away of the aggregates is also connected to the four observations.[73] In this text, the monk Udāyī expresses his deep appreciation for the teaching of the Buddha who taught him "'form,' 'arising of form,' 'passing away of form' ... 'passing away of consciousness.'" He then continues to say:

> Then, sir, having gone to an empty hut, after pondering the rise and fall of these five aggregates of clinging, I realized "this is suffering" truly, I realized "this is the arising of suffering" truly, I realized "this is the cessation of suffering" truly. I realized "this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering" truly. The truth was penetrated in me and the path was obtained. This having been cultivated (*bhāvita*) and strengthened (*bahulīkata*) in me, abiding in this very way (*tathā tathā*) it will lead to the state so that I will know "birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what is to be done has been done, there will be no more being in this state."[74]

[72] SN II.27–28: *Dasabalasamannāgato, bhikkhave, tathāgato catūhi ca vesārajjehi samannāgato āsabhaṃ ṭhānaṃ paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīhanādaṃ nadati, brahmacakkaṃ pavatteti – iti rūpaṃ iti rūpassa samudayo iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo, iti vedanā iti vedanāya samudayo iti vedanāya atthaṅgamo, iti saññā iti saññāya samudayo iti saññāya atthaṅgamo, iti saṅkhārā iti saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo iti saṅkhārānaṃ atthaṅgamo, iti viññāṇaṃ iti viññāṇassa samudayo iti viññāṇassa atthaṅgamo. Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati. Imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati. Yadidaṃ avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā; saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ. . .pe. . . evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Avijjāya tveva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho; saṅkhāranirodhā viññāṇanirodho. . .pe. . . evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotīti.*

[73] See also the quote from the *Dutiyavibhaṅga-sutta* on page 157.

[74] SN V.89–90: *So khvāhaṃ, bhante, suññāgāragato imesaṃ pañcupādānakkhandhānaṃ ukkujjāvakujjaṃ samparivattento 'idaṃ dukkhan'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī*

Here we find the perception of the arising and passing away of the aggregates to be connected to the four observations, which themselves lead to liberation. Notice that according to this text, seeing the arising and passing away of the aggregates is not equal to the four observations, which in turn are not equal to liberation. Rather there is a sequence in which these realizations lead into each other. Nonetheless, there is still an intimate connection between these three elements, which participate in the same development of insight: it is "the pondering of the rise and fall of the aggregates" that led Udāyī to realize the four truths, which themselves involve a perception of arising and ceasing. Then, after cultivating and strengthening this vision, liberation may take place. The *Udāyī-sutta* thus not only exhibits a deep correspondence between the doctrines of selflessness and the four truths; it also echoes the claim that liberation results from a sustained reflection on arising and cessation.

We must now look squarely at the materials and ask ourselves a bold, candid question: does the fact that the Nikāyas speak of different doctrines in similar terms attest to the fact that they are full of contradictions, or does it rather reveal an underlying unity and coherence? One could argue that the texts I have quoted should be seen as an over-creative, or possibly even a manipulative tampering, with the textual presentation of these doctrines. But to my mind, the reading that sees these central doctrines as theoretical ramifications of a basic set of meditative perceptions is far more compelling. We can easily imagine early Buddhist meditators exploring the perception of the arising and passing away of the aggregates or of other Buddhist categories of analysis in different states of mind that are either more conceptual and philosophical or more quiet and meditative. Over time, given that this perception can lend itself to different ideas that are congenial to the basic outlook of the tradition, the insight was defined in diverse manners, which later grew to become the central Buddhist philosophical doctrines. These doctrines were, however, originally different ways of speaking about and describing core meditative experiences; they revolve around different aspects of the perceived events – their conditioned, unstable, unsatisfactory nature. Today, we have become accustomed to reading the descriptions of Buddhist insight in terms of later philosophical theories. But the Nikāyas appear rather to have been molded in a less mature stage of this developmental process when reflection was

paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ. Dhammo ca me, bhante, abhisamito, maggo ca me paṭiladdho; yo me bhāvito bahulīkato tathā tathā viharantaṃ tathattāya upanessati yathāhaṃ – 'khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā'ti pajānissāmi.

growing more systematic but in which the scent of the earlier methods of observation can still be discerned upon a close enough reading. The Nikāyas still confirm a coherent logic of the early Buddhist mental cultivation.

The reading offered here suggests that the central doctrines of the Nikāyas betray a close affinity by relying on the perception of arising and cessation. One need not accept that this is all the early doctrines were about; other texts may point in other directions. But the analysis we conducted suggests that they have shared concerns that go back to specific, closely related, meditative experiences. It also seems plausible that the reflection on experience according to the categories of arising and passing away pertains, at least in part, to the realms of *samādhi* meditation. We have already seen two texts titled *samādhi-sutta*, which instruct the practitioner to observe the four truths and the arising and cessation of feelings in *samādhi*.[75] A third *samādhi-sutta*, which is interested in similar observations, appears as the fifth discourse of the *Khandha-saṃyutta*. Here the Buddha says:

> Monks, cultivate *samādhi*. In *samādhi*, monks, a monk knows truly. What does he know truly? He knows the arising and passing away of form . . . of feelings . . . of perceptions . . . of formations . . . of consciousness.
>
> And what, monks, is the arising of form . . . of consciousness? Here, monks, a monk takes pleasure, greets and cleaves.
>
> What does he take pleasure in, greet and cleave to? He takes pleasure in, greets and cleaves to form. After having taken pleasure in, having greeted and having cleaved to form, delight (*nandī*) appears. That delight toward form is attachment. Dependent on this attachment, being arises; dependent on being, birth; dependent on birth, old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery arise. This is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.
>
> [The text repeats the same statement made in relation to the arising of form with regard to the other four aggregates].This monks, is the arising of form . . . the arising of consciousness.
>
> [The text then supplies a complementary description of "the passing away of form . . . the passing away of consciousness" as the non occurence of the events described in the previous paragraph.][76]

[75] See the two *samādhi-suttas* on pp. 147 and 154.

[76] SN III.13–14: *Samādhiṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvetha; samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Kiñ ca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti? Rūpassa samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca, vedanāya samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca, saññāya samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca, saṅkhārānaṃ samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca, viññāṇassa samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca. Ko ca, bhikkhave, rūpassa samudayo, ko vedanāya samudayo, ko saññāya samudayo, ko saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo, ko viññāṇassa samudayo? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati. Kiñ ca abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati? Rūpaṃ abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati. Tassa rūpaṃ abhinandato abhivadato ajjhosāya tiṭṭhato uppajjati nandī. Yā rūpe nandī tad upādānaṃ. Tassupādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā*

Once again we see that the perception of arising and passing away coalesces with the logic of distinct Buddhist teachings; here we find clear reference to the doctrines of the four (noble) truths – addressed through numerous concepts, primary that of delight (*nandī*)[77] – and to dependent-origination. Again, the text clearly says once again that the concrete perception of impermanence is to be cultivated in *samādhi*.

Before we return to read the central theory of enlightenment in light of these understandings, we must stop to reflect on the role of the fourth truth in the formula of the four observations.

4.4 The fourth truth of the path

We have seen that a concrete perception of impermanence underlies the doctrines of the four (noble) truths, dependent-origination, and selflessness. It is clear, however, that in relation to the four truths, this perception contributes to the formulation only of the first three among them; the fourth truth of the path is not part of the observation of arising and passing away and clearly adds a new dimension to the materials. We must now ask how the fourth "truth" is related to the other three; what is the significance of this move from an observation of an event, its arising and its cessation, to an inclusion of "the path that leads to its cessation"? In other words, what is the role of "the path that leads to the cessation of inflows/suffering" in the theory of liberation we are studying?

Here we may suggest that the formula of the four observations represents a more mature and systematic stage in the development of Buddhist teachings than the initial perception of impermanence. Specifically, this formula shows how the fundamental observation of arising and cessation is to be applied in practice; the four truths employ this observation as part of a strategy to cope with human suffering. While this formula is based on the perception of the rise and fall of different elements of experience, it at the

sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Vedanaṃ abhinandati…pe… saññaṃ abhinandati… saṅkhāre abhinandati… viññāṇaṃ abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati. Tassa viññāṇaṃ abhinandato abhivadato ajjhosāya tiṭṭhato uppajjati nandī. Yā viññāṇe nandī tadupādānaṃ. Tassupādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā…pe… evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Ayaṃ, bhikkhave, rūpassa samudayo; ayaṃ vedanāya samudayo; ayaṃ saññāya samudayo; ayaṃ saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo; ayaṃ viññāṇassa samudayo….

[77] The notion of delight (*nandī*) is closely related to the conception of the 4NTs. In this text it replaces *taṇhā* ("desire"), in the scheme of dependent origination. See also the MN's *Mūlapariyāya-sutta's* "delight is the root of suffering" (*nandī dukkhassa mūlanti*). See also the Buddha's instructions to Puṇṇa at MN III.267–268, which offer a corresponding formulation to the text just quoted.

same time moves toward a more comprehensive encapsulation of Buddhist practice that is directed toward the goal of liberation. When we speak of early Buddhist philosophical doctrines as conceptual maps for meditative reflection, we are already dealing with a manipulation of mental observation, which is meant to cause experience to be interpreted in accord with the Buddhist categorization of mental life. With regard to the formula of the four observations, this broader approach is evidenced not only in the fourth element of the path but also in the other three, which revolve around the notion of "suffering"; a variety of mental events that are subjected to the method of analysis of the four observations are abstracted, generalized, and defined as "suffering" – every "this" is "suffering." This definition, although still far removed from the universalized reading of the 4NTs as articulated by the DCP, does take a confident step in that direction. The statement "this is suffering" delicately manages to preserve the tangible quality of an actual cognized event while at the same time it is a theoretical construct that can serve as a guide for further practice.

The fourth "truth" of "the path that leads to the cessation of suffering" appears, however, to create more of a problem. Here we seem to encounter a deviation from the language of experience. This problem is most pressing in the cases in which the four truths are used to characterize liberating events: in liberation the notion of a "path," particularly an "eightfold noble path," is conceptually out of place. It seems possible that the fourth "truth" was annexed to the three other elements in order to supply a succinct presentation of the whole of the Buddhist teaching.[78]

Before questioning the significance of the fourth element in the formula of the four truths, we should recall that there are texts that employ this method of observation without mentioning the last element of "the path that leads to the cessation of X." We saw such an example in the *Bhūta-sutta* discussed above. Another related case is the vision of the aggregates, their arising (*samudaya*) and passing away (*atthaṅgama*), which we discussed in the context of the relationship between the formula of the four truths and the doctrine of selflessness. This suggests that there is a distinction between the first three elements of the formula, which derive directly from the observation regarding the impermanence of the objects of

[78] In this respect, the oft-mentioned medical model of ancient India comes to mind as what may have provided the structure for this development (see Gethin [1998: 63–63, and esp. note 8 on pp. 282–283]. Wezler (1984) has shown, though, that there is no evidence that early Buddhism borrowed the fourfold medical structure from conceptions of Indian medicine prevalent at the time. Nevertheless, as Halbfass (1991: ch. 7, esp. 243–249) has argued, this presentation is natural to the doctrine – "the 'four truths' provide us with an inherently therapeutic paradigm" (246).

reflection, and the fourth element that connects this observation to a more specified practice and to a more mature understanding at liberation. Here we should also take into consideration that, in opposition to the other three "truth", the eightfold *noble* path is consistently defined as *ariya* in the Nikāyas and that it is mentioned many times independently of the formula of the four truths. Hence, as suggested by Dessein (2007: 21), it may be earlier.[79] We may even surmise that it was the connection between the fourth element of the "noble path" and the other three that made the latter "noble" and eventually designated them as "noble truths." When one treads the noble path, her observations of the arising and cessation of suffering also become noble.

In this context, we should notice that when the texts speak of the four truths in the context of liberation, they never employ the concept of "the eightfold noble path" in order to describe "the path." This fully developed notion of the noble path applies only in cases that refer to stages of practice and in which it is clear that the path is meant to lead to, rather than to immediately effect, nibbāna. See the following quote from the NS's *Nagara-sutta*, in which the Buddha says:

> And which, monks, is this ancient path, the ancient road followed by the ancient perfect Buddhas? It is precisely this noble eightfold path, which is correct view ... correct *samādhi*. This, monks, is this ancient path, the ancient road followed by the ancient perfect Buddhas. I followed it, and following it I realized old age and death; I realized the arising of old age and death; I realized the cessation of old age and death; I realized the path that leads to the cessation of old age and death... [The Buddha repeats the same statement regarding links 2 11.][80]

The noble path is the same for all Buddhas, and while following it the Buddha learned to apply the formula of the four truths to the twelve links. Of particular importance here is the distinction between "this noble eightfold path" (*ayaṃ eva ariyo aṭṭaṅgiko maggo*) and the fourth element of the method of observation of the four truths, "the path" that the

[79] While discussing the first part of the DCP, Dessein remarks: "As the eight constituent parts of the noble path can all be seen as characteristic for a 'middle mode of progress', while this is not the case for the three other truths, it is not unlikely that the fourth truth was the first to be proclaimed by the Buddha. This would imply that the four noble truths as a set are a later modification."

[80] SN II. 106: *Katamo ca so, bhikkhave, purāṇamaggo purāṇañjaso pubbakehi sammāsambuddhehi anuyāto? Ayam eva ariyo aṭṭaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ – sammādiṭṭhi ... pe ... sammāsamādhi. Ayaṃ kho so, bhikkhave, purāṇamaggo purāṇañjaso pubbakehi sammāsambuddhehi anuyāto, tam anugacchiṃ; tam anugacchanto jarāmaraṇaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ; jarāmaraṇasamudayaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ; jarāmaraṇanirodhaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ; jarāmaraṇanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ abbhaññāsiṃ. Tam anugacchiṃ; tam anugacchanto jātiṃ abbhaññāsiṃ.*

Buddha later realizes. This distinction shows that "the path" that participates in liberation has another meaning than the full-fledged, complex structure of the eightfold path, which has a fundamentally teleological character of working toward the awareness that will allow liberation to take place. Liberating awareness includes a different kind of "path."[81]

What is the path that is not the eightfold path of the *ariyas*? We may suggest that "the path that leads to the cessation of suffering," which appears in the description of liberation, should be understood as the mental stance that is produced by the diligent cultivation of the eightfold path. It is this stance or attitude – the internalized path – which allows the practitioner to realize "the cessation of suffering." The path one practices teaches the practitioner to respond to the events that arise in his meditation in a way that stops nourishing the causes that give rise to suffering with psychic energy.[82] This approach frees him from the conditioning influence of his own grasping, which is at the root of his present pain and which would bind him to existence and to future rebirths. The consummation of this practice is "the path" that is active during liberation. In this context, the fourth "truth" reflects "*the way* in which suffering is brought to its termination."[83] "The way" is equal to maintaining the correct attitude or the state of mind that has been generated by the path.

A related position has been articulated by Gethin (2001 [1992]), who first defines the *Abhidhamma* understanding of the path (*magga*):

> The image of the path, it might be thought, ought to imply "a path along which one travels from beginning to end"; yet in the Abhidhamma literature "path" comes to describe an experience so specific that it is, at least in the fully developed systems, seen as lasting only a single moment (or at most fifteen thought moments, if we choose to follow the traditions of the Sarvāstivāda).

Gethin continues to speak of this understanding in the context of the Nikāyas:

> But what I have tried to show above is that in the Nikāyas the *ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo* was always primarily conceived of *as a way of practicing or of going along; it is a path in the sense of how one goes, rather than where one*

[81] For other examples that emphasize the noble eightfold path as part of the way to, and not as an aspect of, *nibbāna*, see the *Jambukhādaka-saṃyutta* (SN IV.251–260); the *Mahāli-sutta* (DN I.156–157); the *Dhammadāyāda-sutta* (MN I.16).

[82] Freud's (1950 [1895]) notion of "cathexis," which expresses the investment of psychic or libidinal energy in mental objects, is particularly applicable here.

[83] This would be an adequate translation for *magga/mārga* and *paṭipadā/pratipad* according to both PED and MWSD.

> *goes*. I mean by this that the image of the "path" in the Nikāyas seems much more concerned with how one travels or one's means of conveyance than with the sequence of places through which one passes on the journey. This is particularly clear with the image of the *ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo* as a "divine vehicle" (*brahma-yāna*). If one considers this image of the *Mahācattārīsaka* treatment, the point seems to be that on the one hand there is a kind of consistency about how one travels at all stages of the journey, on the other hand a transformation occurs: one may start in a chariot and finish in a chariot, yet the chariot one sets out is old, broken and in need of repair, the chariot one arrives in is suited to a god.[84]

A number of texts lend themselves to this reading of the fourth truth as expressing "how one goes, rather than where one goes." Thus, for example, says the *Vedanā-sutta* of the *Magga-saṃyutta*:

> These, monks, are the three feelings. Which three? Feelings of pleasure, of pain, and of neither pleasure no pain; these, monks, are the three feelings. *The noble eightfold path is to be cultivated for the correct understanding of these three feelings*. Which noble eightfold path? That which is right view . . . right *samādhi*. The noble eightfold path, monks, is to be cultivated for the correct understanding of these three feelings.[85]

This quite innocent discourse, which reads like so many others, reveals more than is apparent at first sight. It says that "the noble eightfold path is to be cultivated for the correct understanding (*pariññāya*) of these three feelings," that is that the path leads to the true understanding of feelings; the path is practiced until it creates the correct conditions for true understanding to take place. With the path fully developed, the identification of feelings will allow one to abandon them or to detach from them; this supplies the conditions for liberation. Indeed, in another discourse with the same title later in the same collection, this passage is repeated but is slightly expanded in order to say that "The noble eightfold path is to be cultivated for the realization of these three feelings, for their correct understanding, for their destruction, for their abandonment."[86]

[84] Gethin (2001 [1992]: 224, emphasis mine).

[85] SN V.21–22: *Tisso imā, bhikkhave, vedanā. Katamā tisso? Sukhā vedanā dukkhā vedanā adukkhamasukhā vedanā – imā kho, bhikkhave, tisso vedanā. Imāsaṃ kho, bhikkhave, tissannaṃ vedanānaṃ pariññāya ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo bhāvetabbo. Katamo ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo? Seyyathidaṃ – sammādiṭṭhi . . . pe . . . sammāsamādhi. Imāsaṃ kho, bhikkhave, tissannaṃ vedanānaṃ pariññāya ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo bhāvetabbo.*

[86] SN V.57: *Imāsaṃ kho, bhikkhave, tissannaṃ vedanānaṃ abhiññāya pariññāya parikkhayāya pahānāya ayaṃ ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo bhāvetabbo*. This formulation is repeated in relation to a long list of faults to be known and abandoned, such as suffering and the inflows, in discourses 161–81 of the collection.

An interesting formulation that introduces the path as generating an attitude that will allow liberation to take place appears in a large group of discourses from the *Magga-saṃyutta*. Here it is quoted from the *Paṭhamapācīnaninna-sutta*:[87]

> Just as, monks, the Ganges river bends, slopes and inclines toward the east, in the very same way, monks, a monk a cultivates and strengthens the noble eightfold path bends, slopes and inclines toward *nibbāna*. And how, monks, does a monk who cultivates and strengthens the noble eightfold path bend, slope and incline toward nibbāna? Here, monks, a monk cultivates right view . . . right *samādhi* that relies on detachment, dispassion and cessation and that matures in relinquishing. In this way, monks, a monk who cultivates and strengthens the noble eightfold path bends, slopes and inclines toward nibbāna.[88]

The mind that has been cultured by the eightfold noble path naturally inclines toward nibbāna. This passage on the "inclining river," which forms one of the core structures of the *Magga-saṃyutta*, strongly suggests that the path creates a mental tendency to react in way that is in tune with cessation and liberation. This passage also incorporates another pivotal formula of the *Magga-saṃyutta*, which says that the monk is to practice the eight elements of the path in a way that they "rely on detachment, dispassion, cessation and *mature in relinquishing*" (*vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ*).[89] The path aims at fulfilling itself in an emotional and cognitive adoption of relinquishing. This understanding is expressed also by another central formula of the *Magga-saṃyutta*, which has it that the way to develop and fortify the eightfold path is that each of its elements "ends in the removal of passion, ends

[87] The *Paṭhamapācīnaninna-sutta* is discourse number 91 in the *Sacca-saṃyutta*. Discourses 92–138 are near replicas of it. The formulation it offers is also incorporated into discourses 139–81. It thus appears in over half of the *Sacca-saṃyutta*'s discourses.

[88] SN V.38: *Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, gaṅgā nadī pācīnaninnā pācīnapoṇā pācīnapabbhārā; evam eva kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bhāvento ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bahulīkaronto nibbānaninno hoti nibbānapoṇo nibbānapabbhāro. Kathañ ca, bhikkhave, bhikkhu ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bhāvento ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bahulīkaronto nibbānaninno hoti nibbānapoṇo nibbānapabbhāro? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sammādiṭṭhiṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ . . . pe . . . sammāsamādhiṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bhāvento ariyaṃ aṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ bahulīkaronto nibbānaninno hoti nibbānapoṇo nibbānapabbhāro.*

[89] This formulation according to which the monk is to develop the eightfold path so that each of the eight elements is to "rely on detachment, dispassion, cessation and mature in relinquishing" is repeated in a large number of texts in the *Magga-saṃyutta*. It is first introduced in discourse number 49 and then employed in discourses 50–55, 63–69, 77–83, and 91–181.

in the removal of hate, ends on the removal of confusion" (*rāgavinayapariyosānaṃ dosavinayapariyosānaṃ mohavinayapariyosānaṃ*).[90]

A remarkable statement to this effect comes from the *Paṭipadā-sutta* of the *Khandha-saṃyutta*. Here the Buddha says:

> Monks, I will teach you the path that leads to the arising of identity and the path that leads to the cessation of identity. Listen to it! And which, monks, is the path (*paṭipadā*) that leads to the arising of identity? Here, monks, an unlearned commoner . . . sees form as self, or he sees the self as the possessor of form, or form in self or the self in form. He sees feelings . . . perceptions . . . formations . . . consciousness as self, or he sees the self as the possessor of consciousness, or consciousness in the self or the self in consciousness. This monks, is called "the path that leads to the arising of identity, the path that leads to the arising of identity." This, monks, is called "seeing that leads to the arising of suffering." This precisely is the meaning.
>
> And which, monks, is the path that leads to the cessation of identity? Here, monks, an learned disciple of the noble ones . . . does not see form as self, nor does he see the self as the possessor of form, or form in self or the self in form. He does not see feelings . . . perceptions . . . formations . . . consciousness as self, nor does he see the self as the possessor of conscious ness, or consciousness in the self or the self in consciousness. This monks, is called "the path that leads to the cessation of identity, the path that leads to the cessation of identity." This, monks, is called "seeing that leads to the cessation of suffering." This precisely is the meaning.[91]

The path is unambiguously equated here with a particular way of vision, which works against the common tendency to see the aggregates as the self. Not seeing in this way is "the path that leads to the cessation of identity" or

[90] The formulation that the path "ends in the removal of lust, etc." is first introduced in discourse number 56 and is then repeated in discourses 57–62, 70–76, and 84–181.

[91] SN III.44: *Sakkāyasamudayagāminiñ ca vo, bhikkhave, paṭipadaṃ desessāmi, sakkāyanirodhagāminiñ ca paṭipadaṃ. Taṃ suṇātha. Katamā ca, bhikkhave, sakkāyasamudayagāminī paṭipadā? Idha, bhikkhave, assutavā puthujjano ariyānaṃ adassāvī ariyadhammassa akovido ariyadhamme avinīto sappurisānaṃ adassāvī sappurisadhammassa akovido sappurisadhamme avinīto, rūpaṃ attato samanupassati, rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ; attani vā rūpaṃ, rūpasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Vedanaṃ attato . . . saññaṃ . . . saṅkhāre . . . viññāṇaṃ attato samanupassati, viññāṇavantaṃ vā attānaṃ; attani vā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, 'sakkāyasamudayagāminī paṭipadā, sakkāyasamudayagāminī paṭipadā'ti. Iti hidaṃ, bhikkhave, vuccati 'dukkhasamudayagāminī samanupassanā'ti. Ayam evettha attho.*

Katamā ca, bhikkhave, sakkāyanirodhagāminī paṭipadā? Idha, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako ariyānaṃ dassāvī ariyadhammassa kovido ariyadhamme suvinīto, sappurisānaṃ dassāvī sappurisadhammassa kovido sappurisadhamme suvinīto, na rūpaṃ attato samanupassati, na rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ; na attani vā rūpaṃ, na rūpasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Na vedanaṃ attato . . . na saññaṃ . . . na saṅkhāre . . . na viññāṇaṃ attato samanupassati, na viññāṇavantaṃ vā attānaṃ; na attani vā viññāṇaṃ, na viññāṇasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, 'sakkāyanirodhagāminī paṭipadā, sakkāyanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti. Iti hidaṃ, bhikkhave, vuccati 'dukkhanirodhagāminī samanupassanā'ti. Ayam evettha atthoti.

"seeing that leads to the cessation of suffering." The opposite, deeply ingrained tendency to see a self as related to the aggregates is defined as "the path that leads to the arising of identity" or "seeing the leads to the arising of suffering." The path is said here to equate a mental stance that allows for the cessation of suffering; the correct envisioning of the reality of selflessness is the path. In fact, this passage points to the role of the understanding of selflessness, which can be defined in this context as the attitude that is equal to the full incorporation of "the path"; selflessness is a way of looking at experience that produces detachment and relinquishment and allows one to observe the cessation, rather than the arising, of suffering.[92]

With this understanding of the fourth truth as a form of vision that matures in relinquishing, we are prepared to return to the main theory of awakening and see if it seems reasonable.

4.5 The four observations and liberation

Let us now recall the Buddha's "autobiographical" description of his enlightenment that was introduced in the first chapter. The text describes the sequential entrance into and abiding in the four *jhānas*, in the last of which the mind becomes particularly sharp, calm, and mindful. In this state, three types of knowledge are said to arise, the last of which is equal to liberation. This is how the third, definitive knowledge is related:

> Then, when my concentrated mind was pure, clean, untarnished, free of defilements, supple, workable, steady, beyond vacillation, I directed the mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows. I realized "this is suffering" truly, I realized "this is the arising of suffering" truly, I realized "this is the cessation of suffering" truly, I realized "this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering" truly. I realized "these are inflows" truly, I realized "this is the arising of inflows" truly, I realized "this is the cessation of inflows" truly, I realized "this is the path that leads to the cessation of inflows" truly. Knowing and seeing thus, my mind was liberated from the inflows of desire, from the inflows of (craving for) existence and from the inflows of ignorance.[93]

[92] This formulation is repeated also in the *Chachaka-sutta* at MN III.284–85. The discourse which precedes the text just quoted offers an interesting variation on the wording supplied here when the unlearned commoner, as in the *Paṭipadā-sutta*, regards the aggregates as related to the self. But the "student of the noble ones" rectifies this fault not by "not seeing the aggregates as form etc.," but rather through a vision that emphasizes their impermanence.

[93] For the Pāli text, see note 64 to Chapter 1.

We have learned that the four truths are a way of looking at experiences that allows the practitioner to note "this" experience as painful and to observe its causal arising; by maintaining an attitude of detachment produced by "the path," he will view its "cessation" as well. Cessation refers here at the same time to the passing away of the object and to the end of suffering. We have seen that this method of observation is applied to diverse objects of reflection, among them the inflows (*āsava*). We have also noticed that the four observations hinge on the notion of "suffering," which possesses an abstracted aspect that makes it applicable as an organizing concept for this method of reflection. The logic of "the cessation of suffering" is quite simple: after identifying the casual process that gives rise to "suffering," "the inflows," etc., through the adoption of an attitude of detachment in relation to them, the practitioner no longer grasps at them and divests them of all psychic energy. The *āsavā* receive no more conditioning "fuel," and thus no longer give rise to pain or bond one to the stressful realities of karmic determination. It is in this deep sense that they "cease" and not merely pass away.[94]

This understanding may answer a problem that has troubled certain scholars regarding the dual description of the fourfold method of observation in the standard theory of liberation;[95] the method is applied once to suffering and a second time to the inflows. It appears that the same statement can mark distinct theoretical levels, ranging from the generalized "suffering" to the more particular "inflows." The dual description reflects an implementation of the fourfold method of observation, which is paradigmatically defined in relation to the concept of suffering, as a general rule that is applied to specific inflows that arise in meditative experience and that must be brought to their end in order for liberation to be reached. In fact, we may even consider that the concept of "inflows" is itself too much of an inevitable abstraction as well, which is produced by the need to supply a verbal and conceptual definition for the variegated contents of experience. Ultimately, whatever "comes to be" (*bhūta*) is to be regarded in this same way that will bring about its cessation.

[94] See also Samuel (2008: 137), who refines the account of liberation in Bronkhorst (1993) who sees *jhāna* as the original Buddhist meditation but views the 4NTs as a late insertion. Samuel integrates the destruction of the *āsavas* into the account: "Thus what was seen as original and new in the Buddhist tradition may have been not so much the discursive content as the practical method, which consisted in the application of *dhyāna* meditational states as a way of bringing about the elimination of what we would see in modern language as subliminal or subconscious impressions in the mind or the body-mind." This is an intriguing suggestion although the text appears to state that these "subliminal impressions" are experienced consciously by the practitioner.

[95] Bareau (1963: 87); Schmithausen (1981: 205–6); Bronkhorst (1993: 103–4).

It is crucial to notice that the description of liberation as the knowledge of the destruction of the inflows in the fourth *jhāna* says nothing about the four *noble* truths and does not relate the generalized philosophy of this doctrine. Rather, the texts speak of concrete moments of vision. Notice the choice of translation as well – not "these are *the* inflows, etc.," but rather "these are inflows," with emphasis on the specific, particular contents of observation.

When the 4NTs are not read into the description of the four meditative observations, these can be seen to take place in states of deep meditation. Whether the fourth *jhāna* allows for a minimal degree of conceptual reflection, which would use the formula of the four truths as a method of verbal noting, is questionable. More probable is that a direct perception is being described. This interpretation of the combination of philosophical reflection and deep meditative concentration becomes stronger when we comprehend the Buddhist method of meditation that was discussed in the previous chapter. Buddhist conceptual schemes were employed in order to structure meditative observation and to create an active attention that spontaneously perceives Buddhist truth. The authorized sets of categories helped analyze experience and with continued application, an intimate familiarity developed, which allowed these categories to be internalized and naturally used as part of meditative, non-conceptual observation. At this stage, the method of reflection described by the formula "this is suffering . . ." could be perceived directly in states of *samādhi* without any manipulation by the experienced practitioner. The inflows died out when the fourfold method of reflection became one's perceptual instinct.

It is interesting to see how the only other first-person descriptions of the Buddha's enlightenment in the four major Nikāyas, which appear in the DCP and the APS, also echo this interpretation of the Buddha's enlightenment. The account in the APS is quite different, but there are intriguing connections as well. This text clearly implies that liberation is connected to *samādhi* or *jhāna* as the Buddha reaches enlightenment after obtaining the *samādhi* states of "the base of nothingness" and the "base of neither perception nor non-perception." He then finds a place to meditate that is good for "striving" (*padhāna*), which refers to a zealous meditative effort. Regarding the ideational aspect of enlightenment the APS says only that the Buddha attained "nibbāna, the highest peace from bondage" (*anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ*), to which it adds epithets such as "unborn" (*ajāta*) and "sorrowless" (*asoka*). Nevertheless, when the Buddha reflects on his experience, he describes the state (*thāna*) he awoke to, which is difficult for beings who are bound to existence to grasp, as *paṭiccasamuppāda* and *idappaccayatā* – dependent-origination and "being

dependent on this," respectively. We have already seen in this chapter that dependent-origination is closely related to the four observations. Yet more important is the choice of the term *idappaccayatā*, "being dependent on this" (*idaṃ*); this reflects the focused, concrete perception of the conditioned arising and cessation.[96]

The understanding of the four truths developed here is more strongly connected to the enigmatic expression of the Buddha's awakening in the DCP:

> Monks, "the noble truth 'this is suffering'" the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the understanding, the light arose in me regarding teachings (*dhamma*) unheard of beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is suffering' is to be fully understood" the vision . . . beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is suffering' has been fully understood" the vision . . . beforehand.
>
> Monks, "the noble truth 'this is the arising of suffering'" the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the understanding, the light arose in me regarding truths unheard of beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the arising of suffering' is to be abandoned" the vision . . . beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the arising of suffering' has been abandoned" the vision . . . beforehand.
>
> Monks, "the noble truth 'this is the cessation of suffering'" the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the understanding, the light arose in me regarding truths unheard of beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the cessation of suffering' is to be fully understood" the vision . . . beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the cessation of suffering' has been realized" the vision . . . beforehand.
>
> Monks, "the noble truth 'this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering'" the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the understanding, the light arose in me regarding truths unheard of beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering' is to be cultivated" the vision . . . beforehand. Regarding this, monks, "the noble truth 'this is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering' has been cultivated" the vision . . . beforehand.
>
> So long, monks, as my true (*yathābhūtaṃ*) vision and knowledge (*ñāṇadassana*), in three stages and twelve aspects, was not fully purified regarding these four noble truths, I did not claim, monks, in this world of gods, Māras, Brahamās, recluses and Brahmins, people gods and men "I have awakened to full supreme awakening." Only when, monks, my true vision and knowledge, in three stages and twelve aspects, was fully purified

[96] Although the mentioning of conditionality as part of the Buddha's new enlightened insights is absent from the Chinese version of the APS, the latter adds an element that is integral to the theory of liberation we focus on here: the Buddha ends his narration by saying, in Anālayo's (2011: 28) translation, that "I did not break my sitting until the influxes had been eradicated."

> regarding these four noble truths, did I claim, monks, in this world of gods, Māras, Brahamās, recluses and brahmins, people gods and men "I have awakened to full supreme awakening." And the knowledge and vision arose in me "unshakable is my liberation, this is my last birth, there is now no more rebirth."[97]

This familiar passage appears, at first, to provide a technical, even banal, presentation, which classifies the 4NTs according to a threefold schema that includes (1) the initial comprehension of each truth, (2) the understanding of what one is to do in relation to the truth, and (3) the realization that this has been accomplished. This last aspect clearly relates that the 4NTs have been fully realized, which implies that the Buddha attained liberation, a point he makes clear in the final paragraph. But when we scrutinize this threefold scheme more carefully, we see that the description of the "three stages and twelve aspects" of the 4NTs reflects the observations that are encapsulated in the formula of the four truths. One perceives each "truth" in real time, understands what he must do in relation to it, and presumably acts accordingly, and thus reaches a point where he has

[97] SN V.422–24: *'Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyyan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe . . . pe . . . udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññātan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

'Idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabban'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe . . . pe . . . udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahīnan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

'Idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabban'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe . . . pe . . . udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikatan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

'Idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe. . .pe. . . udapādi. 'Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvitan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

Yāvakīvañ ca me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ na suvisuddhaṃ ahosi, neva tāvāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya 'anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho'ti paccaññāsiṃ.

Yato ca kho me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahosi, athāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya 'anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho'ti paccaññāsiṃ. Ñāṇañ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi – 'akuppā me vimutti, ayam antimā jāti, natthidāni punabbhavo'ti

done what is needed for liberation – suffering is understood, the causes of its arising have been relinquished, its cessation has been realized, and the path that leads to its cessation has been cultivated.

This description of the four (noble) truths in the DCP may be seen as a presentation of the four observations in enhanced resolution: the full realization of each "this" of the four truths is broken down into three successive cognitive moments. The Buddha is able to fully appreciate the contents of his experiences as "suffering"; noticing "the arising of suffering" and fully aware that it is suffering that arises, he eliminates the subjective input that nourishes suffering; this allows him to realize "the cessation of suffering," an event made possible since "the path," the Buddhist approach to reality, has been fully cultivated. The Buddha maintains a correct mental approach in respect to the suffering he identifies and is thus able to abandon the causes of suffering and to attain the cessation of suffering.[98]

Obviously, differences between this description and the central theory of liberation can be identified, but the similarities are striking. These become apparent when the four "noble truths" are understood to be four observations that occur in real time in meditation.

4.6 The first sermon reconsidered

We may now return to the text with which we started this chapter, the DCP, on which the conventionalized, highly influential definition of the 4NTs is based. If we accept the basic argument of this chapter, it may be possible to identify an earlier version of the DCP that is hidden in the midst of this seminal text. Our perception of this discourse should change if the four observations, which express the logic of concrete and embodied meditative experiences, are thought to be at the base of the doctrinally mature teaching of the 4NTs. A new approach to this text is called for, especially if the description of the "three stages and twelve aspects" of the 4NTs in the DCP is considered an instantiation of a method of observation that is expressed by the four observations.

A full analysis of the DCP is beyond the scope of this chapter; some of its elements demand separate study, such as the "middle-path" and its relationship to "the eightfold noble path" or the more mythological and

[98] Anālayo (2009: 127–31) emphasizes that that this passage expresses a realization that transcends an intellectual understanding.

cosmological elements that appear at the end of the discourse.[99] Nevertheless, in light of the analysis of the four truths offered in this chapter, we may suggest that the description of the Buddha's liberation, in which the four (noble) truths are presented in their "three stages and twelve aspects," forms the original core of the DCP. Once we are aware that the notion of a "noble truth" is a more recent one, as highlighted by Norman (1982) and as discussed in the first part of this chapter, we can suggest that the universalized and generalized presentation of the 4NTs that appears before the description of the Buddha's liberation, and which is commonly accepted as the authentic and initial revelation of the 4NTs, is a relatively late addition to the text.[100]

In a recent study, Dessein (2007) has analyzed the different extant versions of the DCP. He sees the description of the "middle mode of progress" (that is the middle way, *madhyamā pratipad*), which is equal to the eightfold noble path, as the most original element in this discourse. This element, he believes, was very early on connected to the understanding that the 4NTs express the main content of the Buddha's teachings. Later, these 4NTs were elaborated into the twelve aspects in three stages.

Dessein's account is surely the most intuitive one in face of the materials. His emphasis on the middle-path as the most original element of the text is supported by the fact that two of the six versions of the DCP he has analyzed use only this part of the discourse to introduce the Buddha's teachings. Yet even this supposedly innocent starting point cannot go uncontested since there are two versions that do not include this element. More importantly, the points made here regarding the rarity and relative lateness of the notion of a "noble truth," as well as the difference between the doctrine of the 4NTs and the prevalent formula of the four observations changes, the picture. In fact, I believe that Dessein underemphasizes an important aspect of his own findings – that the presentation of 4NTs is the part of the discourse that is attested in the smallest number of extant versions of the text; it appears only in two of the six versions he studied, while the "three stages and 12 aspects" appear in four of the six (as do all

[99] For this, see Anderson (1999). Anderson highlights the symbolic nature of the teaching, which possesses important cosmological ramifications. The cosmological aspect is based on Aññā Koṇḍañña's realization at the end of the DCP.

[100] This suggestion is also supported by the fact that the Mūlasarvāstivāda version of the DCP has the "three stages and twelve aspects" presentation of the four noble truths *before* the standardized and apparently later revelation of the teachings. Bareau (1963: 178–81) and later Bronkhorst (1993: 107), basing themselves mainly on a comparison of the different variants of the DCP, also believe that the 4NTs were not part of the primitive version of this text.

elements in the discourse aside from its taking place in the deer park in Vārāṇasī). In this state of affairs, it seems more reasonable to assume that a related version of the SN text we are familiar with today was known to An shigao, who translated the text numbered T. 109 around 170 CE, while this development was unknown to the translators who produced the other versions. The equation of the 4NTs with the Buddha's teaching appears not to have been widely accepted when the other versions of this text were composed and/or translated. It is interesting that as late as the 7th or 8th century, when Yijing produced the version of the DCP numbered T. 110, the conventional presentation of the 4NTs could still not appear as part of the sūtra. It is also telling that in the two places where the 4NTs do appear so does the presentation of the three stages and twelve aspects; nowhere do the 4NTs appear without this ostensible elaboration of the doctrine, a possibility we would expect to encounter if this was the direction of the historical development.

When all these consideration are taken into account, it appears that the presentation of the 4NTs should actually be seen as the *latest* strata of the DCP. This suggestion explains what is probably the greatest anomaly of this discourse – the fact that the noble eightfold path is mentioned twice in close proximity and with no apparent explanation. The noble eightfold path first appears as an exposition of the middle path at the end of the first section of the text and is then introduced once more as the fourth noble truth. If we accept that the presentation of the 4NTs is late, the second appearance of the noble path is part of a later insertion. We may also notice in this respect that the classical presentation of the 4NTs is offered with no introduction and without any guidance in understanding its relationship to the teaching of the middle-path with which the text opened. This last observation strengthens the idea that the 4NTs were incorporated into the text at a later stage.

It is impossible to know under whose sanction the addition of the 4NTs to the DCP was made. Since it does not appear in all versions of the text, however, it is highly unlikely that it was the heart of "the original discourse". Nonetheless, this development was eventually accepted as authoritative within the Buddhist community. This approach to the teaching may be understood as an adaptation to the religious needs of wider audiences. Ultimately, the four observations are relevant mainly for practitioners who devote themselves to their intense application in meditative practice; the four *noble* truths, on the other hand, may be of interest to anybody. Clearly, this ability to invest the Buddha's teachings with significance that relates to the inner worlds of wider classes of students is one of the hallmarks

of the Buddhist tradition; this capacity explains much of Buddhism's popularity and marks its unique success in the Indian, Asian, and by now Western religious scenes.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has argued that the commonly accepted definition of the 4NTs is a relatively late doctrinal development; the notion of a "noble truth" is younger than the meditative perception that is at the root of the doctrine. This meditative perception was originally expressed by the formula of the four observations – "*this* is suffering, etc." – which emphasizes the concrete perception of mental events and the adoption of the correct mental stance that will allow for their utter cessation. A reflection structured according to this method of observation would include a perception of a mental object as suffering, together with an identification of the causes that give rise to it and of its passing away with its determining karmic influence abated. This last element is the object's "cessation," which is caused by maintaining a correct, detached attitude, referred to as "the path to the cessation of suffering." All of these are concrete and specific events that take place in the real time of meditative experience.

At the heart of the doctrine of the four truths is a meditative perception regarding the arising and passing away of mental events. This same perception is instrumental for the doctrines of dependent-origination and selflessness. Thus, the most central early Buddhist philosophical doctrines reflect a remarkable underlying unity. They are the theoretical ramifications of one set of meditative perceptions, which focuses on the conditioned and ephemeral nature of all elements of experience as these are observed in a quieted mind.

The meditative perception that is encapsulated by the formula of the four observations is also at work in the Buddha's descriptions of his enlightenment. Most importantly, it explains the central description or theory of liberation that was presented in the first chapter of this study. The implementation of this method of observation in the fourth *jhāna* with respect to the inflows was understood to equal liberation. The improved understanding of this theory allows us to see that the functioning of "Buddhist philosophy" in *samādhi* meditation is not only reasonable but even quite coherent.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The main point made in this study is that the four noble truths were originally a specific method of meditative observation, which was designed to facilitate highly valued forms of Buddhist experience; so valued, indeed, that these experiences, at mature stages of practice, could be liberation itself. The 4NTs were not, at first, theoretical understandings that broadly characterized the nature and goals of human life. Rather, the 4NTs are a philosophical doctrine that developed from the original set of four observations, which is the true way this teaching is articulated in the Nikāyas. The four noble truths are only an echo of the early meditative instruction, and they are almost insignificant to the body of the early discourses; they only appear at the latest stage of editing the canon, at a time when the doctrine was emerging as a valid and meaningful encapsulation of the Buddhist view of reality. I would go so far as to guess that the Buddha himself was not familiar with the concept of the four noble truths, although the concept of a noble path does appear to be quite early.

This claim about the earlier, meditative, restricted reality of the four noble truths has two main ramifications. One is that the central theory of liberation articulated in the early Pāli discourses is both reasonable and trustworthy. This theory sees awakening as an experience of three forms of knowledge that occur in the deep meditative state of the fourth *jhāna*. The last, most decisive of these is "the destruction of the inflows," which includes a perception of the earlier formula of the 4NTs as a set of meditative observations. Hitherto, scholars were suspicious of this theory, since they read the generalized ideas of the 4NTs into the words of the texts, which only related the four meditative observations ("This is suffering, etc."). These scholars could not understand how a discursive, philosophical understanding can take place in the quieted trance of the fourth *jhāna*. But once the texts are allowed to speak for themselves, they are seen to describe a specific form of meditative observation that can be thought to occur in *samādhi*. It is true that when a practitioner begins

using the formula of the four observations as a guide for his practice, this would demand a serious degree of conceptual manipulation. But with practice, as he grows accustomed to the form of vision the formula is meant to induce, he does not have to actively apply the categorical scheme of the four observations since he immediately sees and reacts to the events that arise in his meditation according to the logic of the system. The key to this understanding is that the earlier version of the 4NTs is a method of reflecting on concrete and specific mental events.

The central theory of liberation in the early discourses thus teaches that inflows are destroyed in deep *samādhi*, when one sees an event and identifies it as painful ("this is suffering," "these are inflows," corresponding to the first NT). He then observes the particular conditioning that gives rise to the event ("this is the arising of suffering," "this is the arising of inflows," the second NT). He fully implements the Buddhist path by maintaining a mental attitude that inclines toward renunciation and dispassion ("this is the path to the cessation of suffering/inflows," the fourth NT). Therefore, he can see the cessation of the event (this is the cessation of suffering/inflows," the third NT), in the sense that the event passes by without any psychic energy being invested in it, and thus it ceases both now and for good. The conditioned "inflow" has now lost all determining influence upon the mind.

The second ramification is that it is not only the doctrine of the 4NTs that originates from a meditative perception but also the two other foundational doctrines of Buddhism – dependent-origination and selflessness. In fact, these three seminal teachings all emerge from one, core meditative apprehension regarding the arising and passing away of mental events. Dependent-origination focuses on the conditioning that gives rise to mental events, and its "against the current" (*paṭiloma*) counterpart of dependent-cessation concentrates on the conditioning that allows them to subside. This doctrine, like the earlier format of the 4NTs, goes back to specific observations of the "*this*es" of meditative experience, that is to a perception of the arising and ceasing of particular mental objects or states. Selflessness, in turn, is a mental stance of detachment afforded by the close encounter with the flow of experience. It employs the categories of the five aggregates in order to focus on the spontaneous appearance and passing away of all events. This doctrine clearly possesses great theoretical significance, but its general philosophical meaning is only the outer layer of the teaching, which is meant to be fully realized in a meditative setting. Like the 4NTs and dependent-origination, it expresses an aspect of the embodied perception of impermanence.

The three most foundational philosophical doctrines of Buddhism can thus be seen to develop out of the one main type of meditative perception regarding the arising and passing away of mental events. From this initial perception, different theoretical positions emerge – selflessness as a philosophical and psychological understanding, dependent-origination as an abstract law of causality, and the 4NTs as a reflection on the ubiquity of suffering and its origin in desire. But we should not mistake the more external or abstract expressions of these doctrines for the whole picture; when the early Buddhist texts are read closely, the language of meditative observation manifests. This understanding allows us to identify an integral coherence not only in the early Buddhist body of doctrine but also in the texts that reveal it.

In reaching these understandings, a nuanced approach to the early Buddhist texts has been employed. First, the texts were trusted to mean what they say so that careful listening to their specific wording would allow a richer understanding of their positions. When the texts say, for example, *idaṃ dukkan(ti)* – "this is suffering" – they speak of specific events, the different "thises" of consciousness, which can be pointed to by the observer. In this respect, the words of the texts were taken seriously and were read with enhanced attention. In another respect though, the texts had to be "read through," so that the conventional understandings of doctrines or of terms would not threaten our ability to decipher the concrete language that is behind them. When the texts say, for example, "dependent on contact, feelings (arise)" (*phassapaccayā vedanā* [*saṃbhavanti*]), this can be seen at first sight as no more than an expression of the theoretical exposition of the twelve links, which themselves are often thought of as a particular case of the broader principle of conditionality. But if this same text is "read through," without taking the conventionalized doctrine as its intended stopping point, one can see that such a stylized and worked over teaching is not necessarily implied by the texts; the twelve links do not discuss abstract notions of conditionality but focus on subjective processes of conditioning that take place in real time. The core of these processes is then seen to be the observation of the specific objects of meditative reflection, even if in the texts as we have them today these concrete reflections are mixed at times with later philosophical or doctrinal developments.

We often do not know how different canonical texts relate to each other and to what degree they should be seen as dogma. Some discourses may be late, and many of them reflect a fair amount of systematization and formalization. Nevertheless, the texts that are assembled in the main four

Nikāyas of the Pāli canon are still fresh enough to retain at least some clearly identifiable traces of the insights and experiences that were at the root of later doctrinal developments; they still can be read as descriptions of meditative experiences, even if these experiences are idealized and are no less prescribed than described by the texts. Relying on the basic core of meditative reflections, different patterns of thought that attempted to come to terms with these reflections grew into the central structures of Buddhist doctrine. Like the orange we discussed in Chapter 1 (see pp. 13–15), which can be simultaneously both sweet and sour, a deep familiarity with the arising and passing away of mental events can be described according to different theoretical schemes – selflessness, the four noble truths, or dependent-origination.

One central element of my thesis may seem fundamentally counter-intuitive, at least in respect to what I perceive to be deeply entrenched Buddhist intuitions. Buddhist meditation is commonly seen as a form of deconstructive therapy, and in many senses it is – it clears the mind of ingrained habits and tendencies that may be truly unhealthy. But at the same time, the meditative practices we discussed, specifically those that relate to the meditations on mindfulness, no less condition or re-condition the mind: in Buddhist meditation one must know what to see and how to see it. In order that Buddhist philosophical thinking may truly function as liberating wisdom in meditation, it must turn into a wisdom that is part of the very way the mind perceives and spontaneously interprets its own experiences. Buddhist wisdom is thus not a naked perception of "things as they are." It is rather a carefully architectured understanding that is studied and practiced so that reality is seen to correspond to it. This eye of wisdom effortlessly perceives its objects as dangerous, fleeting, and as potential referents for self-grasping; it thus allows for a liberating emotional detachment.

To my mind, there is a deep logic to this core structure of a fundamental meditative vision that is cultivated and reflected on so that it eventually shapes the Buddhist philosophical doctrines, practices, and liberating experiences. Although diverse visions obviously took place in the minds of early Buddhist meditators, the ones that focus on the significance of the arising and passing away of mental events appear to have been particularly influential. Other meditative practices were surely developed and integrated into the system, and philosophical reflection was surely determined by the broader Indian context as well. Still, these developments continued to relate to the original, defining experiences and their basic logical pattern. We can see other descriptions of liberation – such as the

"intellectual" liberating insight that is said to occur to the Buddha's students, apparently outside meditation – as a clear echo of the core structure we identified; these students experience non-self in relation to a perception of impermanence. Other theories that are based on idiosyncratic combinations between the destruction of negative potencies (*āsavā*, "inflows"), wisdom, and *samādhi* can also be seen to reflect the same structure. With this understanding the early Buddhist texts appear more reliable and coherent.

We thus attain a sharper vision of the Buddha and of his teachings; at least, we reach a more reliable presentation of the way the authors of the Pāli discourses perceived the Buddha. The authorial or editorial voices behind the literary Buddha of the Pāli canon were interested in detachment and sought ways to transform the mind so that it would live detachment. Their Buddha entertained a philosophy that had deep metaphysical commitments, but at the same time, the theoretical aspects of this philosophy were secondary to the practical aim of restructuring experience. In the truly detached mind that entered the profound meditative space of *samādhi*, awareness to Buddhist truth was enhanced. In this state, the Buddha awakened to a realization he could call "liberation." This insight took place when he spontaneously reacted to the negative potencies in his mind in a manner fully congruent with the Buddhist philosophical approach to life. In his meditation, he directly perceived the realities described by Buddhist philosophy.

References

Allon, M. 1997. "The Oral Composition and Transmission of Early Buddhist Texts." In *Indian Insights: Buddhism Brahmanism and Bhakti, Papers from the Annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions*, edited by P. Connolly and S. Hamilton, 39 61. London: Luzac Oriental.

Anālayo. 2003. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications.

2005. "Some Pāli Discourses in the Light of Their Chinese Parallels." *Buddhist Studies Review* 22 (1): 1 14.

2005a. "Some Pāli Discourses in the Light of Their Chinese Parallels Part Two." *Buddhist Studies Review* 22 (2): 93 105.

2006. "The Chinese Parallel Version to the *Dantabhūmi Sutta*." *Buddhist Studies Review* 23 (1): 5 19.

2006a. "The *Ekottarika-āgama* Parallel to *the Saccavibhaṅga-sutta* and the Four (Noble) Truths." *Buddhist Studies Review* 23 (2): 145 53.

2008. "Rebirth and the Gandhabba." *Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1: 91 105.

2008a. "Reflections on Comparative Āgama Studies." *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 21: 3 22.

2009. *From Craving to Liberation: Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pāli Discourses*. Vol. 1. Taiwan: The Buddhist Association of the United States.

2009a. "Views and the Tathāgata A Comparative Study and Translation of the Brahmajāla in the Chinese Dīrgha āgama." In *Buddhist and Pali Studies in Honour of the Venerable Professor Kakkapalliye Anuruddha*, edited by K. L. Dhammajoti et al., 183 234. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong.

2011. *A Comparative Study of the* Majjhima nikāya. Vols. 1 and 2. Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.

2011a. "Brahmā's Invitation: The *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* in the Light of its *Madhyama-āgama* Parallel." *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 1: 7 38.

2011b. "Living in Seclusion and Facing Fear The Ekottarika āgama Counterpart to the Bhayabherava sutta." In *Buddhism as a Stronghold of*

Free Thinking, edited by S. C. A. Fay and I. M. Bruckner, 203 231. Nuesttal, Germany: Edition Unbuntu.

Anderson, C. 1999. *Pain and its Ending: The Four Noble Truths in the Theravāda Buddhist Canon*. Richmond: Curzon.

Arbel, K. 2004. "The Attainment of 'Cessation of Perception and Feeling': A Study of Saññāvedayitanirodha in the Pāli Nikāyas." Master's thesis, University of Bristol.

"Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajnāpāramitāmahāyānasūtra." *The Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon*. http://dsbc.uwest.edu/node/4368.

Bareau, A. 1963. *Recherches sur la Biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapiṭaka et les Vinayapiṭaka Anciens: de la Quéte de L'éveil a la Conversion de Śāriputra et de Maudgalyāyana*. Paris: *École Française D'extrème-orient.*

Bechert, H. 1992. "The Writing Down of the Tripiṭaka in Pāli." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* 36: 45 53.

Bliss, T. V. P., and G. L. Collingridge. 1993. "A Synaptic Model of Memory: Long Term Potentiation in the Hippocampus." *Nature* 361: 31 39.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1978. *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views, The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentarial Exegesis*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikaya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, 2011. What does Mindfulness Really Mean? A canonical perspective. *Contemporary Buddhism* 12: 19 39.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans. 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications in Association with the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.

Boisvert, M. 1997. *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Brahmāli, Bhikkhu. 2007. "*Jhāna* and *Lokuttāra Jhāna*." *Buddhist Studies Review* 24 (1): 75 90.

2009. "What the *Nikāyas* Say and Do not Say about *Nibbāna*." *Buddhist Studies Review* 26 (1): 33 66.

Brick, D. 2006. "Transforming Tradition into Texts: The Early Development of *Smṛti*." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34: 287 302.

Bronkhorst, J. 1985. "Dharma and Abhidharma." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 48 (2): 305 20.

1993. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Review of *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, by Tilmann Vetter. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 36: 63 68.

1995. "The Buddhas and the Jainas Reconsidered." *Asiatiche Estudien* 49 (2): 330 50.

1998. "Did the Buddha Believe in Karma and Rebirth?" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21 (1): 1 19.

2009. *Buddhist Teachings in India*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Bucknell, R. 1993. "Reinterpreting the *Jhānas*." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 16 (2): 375 403.

1999. "Conditioned Arising Evolves: Variation and Change in Textual Accounts of the *Paṭicca-samuppāda* Doctrine." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22 (2): 311 42.

Burford, G. G. 1991. *Desire, Death and Goodness: The Conflict of Ultimate Values in Theravāda Buddhism*. New York: Peter Lang.

Burnouf, E. (1844) 2010. *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burton, D. 2002. "Knowledge and Liberation: Philosophical Ruminations on a Buddhist Conundrum." *Philosophy East & West* 52 (3): 326 45.

2004. *Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation: A Philosophical Study*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Cabezón, J. I. 1994. *Buddhism and Language*. New York: SUNY Press.

Carrithers, M. 1983. *The Buddha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carter, J. R. 1993. *On Understanding Buddhists: Essays in the Theravāda Tradition in Sri Lanka*. New York: SUNY Press.

Choong, M. (1995) 1999. *The Notion of Emptiness in Early Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

2006. "A Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Versions of the *Bhikkhu Saṃyutta*, a Collection of Early Buddhist Discourses on Monks." *Buddhist Studies Review* 23 (1): 61 70.

2007. "A Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Versions of the *Vaṅgīsa-thera Saṃyutta*, a Collection of Early Buddhist Discourses on the Venerable Vaṅgīsa." *Buddhist Studies Review* 24 (1): 35 45.

Clark, W. E. 1930. "Some Problems in the Criticism of the Sources for Early Buddhist History." *The Harvard Theological Review* 23 (2): 121 47.

Collins, S. 1982. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1990. "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon." *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15: 89 126.

1991. "Review of *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, by Tilmann Vetter." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1): 204.

1995. *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2010. *Nirvana: Concept, Imagery, Narrative*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Conze, E. 1959. *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*. New York: Harper & Row.

1962. *Buddhist Thought in India*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Paperbacks.

Cousins, L. 1973. "Buddhist *Jhāna*: Its Nature and Attainment according to the Pali Sources." *Religion* 3: 115 31.

1992. "The 'Five Points' and the Origins of the Buddhist Schools." *The Buddhist Forum* 2: 27 60.

1992a. "Vitakka/Vitarka and Vicāra, Stages of Samādhi in Buddhism and Yoga." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35: 137 57.

1996. "The Origins of Insight Meditation." *The Buddhist Forum* 5: 35 58.

Cox, C. 1992. "Attainment through Abandonment: The Sarvāstivādin Path of Removing Defilements." In *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Studies in East Asian Buddhism 7), edited by R. Buswell and R. Gimello. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawaii Press, 63 105.

1992a. "Mindfulness and Memory: The Scope of *Smṛti* from Early Buddhism to the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma." Gyatso: 67 108.

1993. "Dependent Origination: Its Elaboration in Early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma Texts." In *Researches in Indian and Buddhist Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Professor Alex Wayman*, edited by R. K. Sharma, 119 41. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Crangle, E. F. 1994. *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

de Silva, Lily. 1978. "Cetovimutti, Paññāvimutti and Ubhatobhāgavimutti." *Pali Buddhist Review* 3 (3): 118 45.

de Jong, J. W. 1993. "The Beginnings of Buddhism." *The Eastern Buddhist* 26 (2): 11 30.

2000. "The Buddha and his Teachings." In *Buddhist Studies: The Legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao: (Wisdom, Compassion and the Search for Understanding)*. Edited by J. A. Silk, 171 81. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Deleanu, F. 2000. "A Preliminary Study on Meditation and the Beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism." *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology* 3: 65 113.

2010. "Agnostic Meditations on Buddhist Meditations." *Zygon* 45 (3): 605 26.

Department of Cross Cultural and Regional Studies at The University of Copenhagen. *Critical Pāli Dictionary*. http://pali.hum.ku.dk/cpd/.

Dessein, B. 2007. "The First Turning of the Wheel Doctrine: Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsaṃghika Controversy." In *The Spread of Buddhism*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, vol. 16., edited by A. Heirman and S. P. Bumbacher, 15 48. Leiden: Brill.

Devdas, N. 2008. *Cetanā and the Dynamics of Volition in Theravāda Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Douglas, M. (1970) 2003. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Routledge.

Dunne, J. 1996. "Thoughtless Buddha, Passionate Buddha." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64: 525 556.

Edgerton, F. 1924. "The Meaning of Sāṃkhya and Yoga." *American Journal of Philology* 45: 1 46.

1959. "Did the Buddha have a System of Metaphysics?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (2): 81 85.

(1953) 1993. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary,* Vol. 2: *Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Ergard, J. T. 1977. *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism: An Analysis of the Contextual Structures of an Arahant-formula in the Majjhima-Nikāya*. Leiden: Brill.

Fenner, P. 1990. *The Ontology of the Middle Way*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Forman, R. K. C. 1990. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Franco, E. 2009. "Meditation and Metaphysics: On their Mutual Relationship in South Asian Buddhism." In *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, edited by E. Franco, in collaboration with Dagmar Eigner, 93 132. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Frauwallner, E. 1973. *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Freedman, Y. 2011. "Death, Performance and Text in the Early Upaniṣads" PhD diss., the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Freud, S. (1895) 1950. "A Project for a Scientific Psychology." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 1, edited and translated by J. Starchey, 283 343. London: Hogarth Press.

Firston, K. 2010. "The Free Energy Principle: A Unified Brain Theory?" *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11: 127 38.

Frye, N. (1982) 1983. *The Great Code: the Bible and Literature*. San Diego: Harvest/HBJ.

1990. *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "The Bible and Literature*." San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Fuller, P. 2005. *The Notion of Diṭṭhi in Theravāda Buddhism: The Point of View*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Geiger, W. (1943) 1978. *Pāli Literature and Language*. New Delhi: Munishram Manoharlal.

1994. *A Pāli Grammar*. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Gethin, R. 1986. "The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment in the Nikāyas and Early Abhidhamma." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14: 35 53.

1997. "Cosmology and Meditation: From the Agaññā Sutta to the Mahāyāna." *History of Religions* 36: 183 217.

1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(1992) 2001. *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. Oxford: Oneworld.

2004. "He Who Sees Dhamma Sees Dhammas: Dhamma in Early Buddhism." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32: 513 42.

2005. "On the Nature of *Dhammas*: A Review Article." *Buddhist Studies Review* 22: 175 94.

2011. "On some Definitions of Mindfulness." *Contemporary Buddhism* 12: 263 279.

Glass, A. 2006. "Connected Discourses in Gandhāra: a Study, Edition, and Translation of Four Saṃyuktāgama Type Sūtras from the Senior Collection." PhD diss., University of Washington.

Gombrich, R. F. 1988. *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

1990. "Recovering the Buddha's message." In *Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference.* Vol. II: *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, edited by D. S. Ruegg and L. Schmithausen, 5 20. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
1996. *How Buddhism Began*. London: Athlone.
2009. *What the Buddha Thought*. London: Equinox.
Gomez, L. 1976. "Proto Mādhyamika in the Pāli canon." *Philosophy East & West* 26 (2): 137 65.
1999. "Seeing, Touching, Counting, Accounting: Sāṃkhya as Formal Thought and Intuition," *Asiatische Studien* 53.3: 693 711.
1981. "Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation Theory." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (4): 605 24.
Griffiths, P. 1983. "Buddhist Jhāna: A Form Critical Study." *Religion* 13: 55 68.
1986. *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem*. La Salle: Open Court.
1992. "Memory in Classical Indian Yogācāra." In Gyatso, 109 131.
Gyatso, J., ed. 1992. *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*. New York: SUNY Press.
1999. "Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1): 113 46.
Hadot, P. 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
2002. *What is Ancient Philosopy*? Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Hakamaya, N. 1975. "Nirodhasamāpatti: Its Historical Meaning in the Vijñaptimātratā System." *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū (Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies)* 23: 33 43.
Halbfass, W. 1988. *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*. New York: SUNY Press.
1991. *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*. New York: SUNY Press.
Hamilton, S. 1996. *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism*. London: Luzac Oriental.
2003. *Early Buddhism: A New Approach, The I of the Beholder*. Great Britain: Curzon.
Harris, I. C. 1994. *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Hart, W. (1987) 1990. *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S. N. Goenka*. Singapore: Vipassana Publications.
Hartmann, J. 2009. "From Words to Books: Indian Buddhist Manuscripts in the First Millenium CE." In *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by S. C. Berkwitz, J. Schober, and C. Brown, C., 95 105. London and New York: Routledge.
Harvey, P. 1995. *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon.
2009. "The Four *Ariya-saccas* as 'True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled' the Painful, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Way Going to This' Rather

than 'Noble Truths' Concerning These." *Buddist Studies Review* 26 (2): 197 227.

Forthcoming. "The Nature of the Eight Factored *Ariya, Lokuttara Magga* in the *Sutta*s Compared to the Pali Commentarial Idea of it as Momentary." *Religions of South Asia* 8 (1).

Hebb, D. O. 1949. *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*. New York: John Wiley & Sons; London: Chapman & Hall.

Holder, J. J., trans. 2006. *Early Buddhist Discourses*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.

Hull, H. W. (1989) 1990. *The Vedic Origins of Karma: Cosmos as Man in Ancienty Indian Myth and Ritual*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Hwang, S. 2006. *Metaphor and Literature in Buddhism: The Doctrinal History of Nirvana*. London: Routledge.

Iida, S., (1991) 1993. *Facets of Buddhism*. London: Kegan Paul International.

Johansson, R. E. A. (1973) 1977. *Pali Buddhist Texts, Explained for the Beginner*. Oxford: Curzon & IBH.

1979. *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*. Oxford: Curzon & IBH.

Jordan, R. W. 1990. *Ancient Concepts of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jurewicz, J. 2000. "Playing with Fire: The Pratītyasamutpada from the Perspective of Vedic Thought." *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 26: 77 104.

Kalupahana, D. J. 1975. *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Kapestein, M. 2001. *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

King, W. L. (1978) 1992. *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Katz, S. T., ed. 1978. *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Klaus, K. 1992. "On the Meaning of the Root *smṛ* in Vedic Literature." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* 36: 77 86.

Klein, A. 1992. "Mental Concentration and the Unconditioned: A Buddshit Case for Unmediated Experience." In *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, edited by R. Buswell and R. Gimello. Studies in East Asian Buddhism 7. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawai'i Press, 269 308.

Kragh, U. T. 2006. *Early Buddhist Theories of Action and Result: A Study of karmaphalasambandha, Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā, Verses 17.1 20*. Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien.

Kuan, T. 2008. *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism: New Approaches through Psychology and Textual Analysis of Pali, Chinese and Sanskrit Sources*. London: Routledge.

La Vallée Poussin, L. de. 1936 1937. "Musīla et Nārada," *Mélanges Chinois et Boudhiques* 5: 189 92.

(1917) 1982. *The Way to Nirvāṇa: Six lectures on Ancient Buddhism as a Discipline of Salvation*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Lamotte, E. 1980. "Conditioned Co production and Supreme Enlightenment." In *Buddhist Studies in Honor of Walpola Rahula*, edited by S. Balasooriya, A. Bareau, R. Gombrich, S. Gunasingha, U. Mallawaracchi, and E. Perry, London: Gordon Fraser; Sri Lanka: Vimamsa, 118 32.

(1958) 1988. *History of Indian Buddhism*. Translated by Sarah Boin Webb. Louvain: Oeeters Press.

Lindtner, C. 1997. "The Problem of Precanonical Buddhism." *Buddhist Studies Review* 14 (2): 109 39.

Lincoln, B. 1986. *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Lopez, D. S. 1987. *A Study of Svātantrika*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

1992. "Memories of the Buddha." In Gyatso, 21 45.

MacDonald, A. 2009. "Knowing Nothing: Candrakīrti and Yogic Perception." In *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, edited by E. Franco and D. Eigner, 133 69. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Malamoud, C. 1989. *Cuire le Monde: Rite et Pensée dans l'Inde Ancienne*. Paris: Éditions la Découverte.

Masefield, P. 1986. *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism*. Colombo: The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies.

Matilal, B. K. 1990. *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

McDermott, J. P. 1980. "Karma and Rebirth in Early Buddhism." In *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, edited by W. D. O'Flaherty, 165 92. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Minh Ciau, Bhikṣu Th. 1991. *The Chinese Madhyama Āgama and the Pāli Majjhima Nikāya: A Comparative Study*. Delhi: Motilala Banarasidass.

Monier Williams, M. (1899) 2003. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged, with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages, A New Edition Greatly Enlarged and Improved by E. Leumann; C. Cappeller and Other Scholars*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

Morgan, K. A. 2000. *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudagamuwa, M., and A. V. von Rospatt. 1998. "Review of How Buddhism Began, The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings, by Richard Gombrich." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41: 164 79.

Nagao, G. 1991. *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*. New York: SUNY Press.

Nakamura, H. 1980. "The Theory of 'Dependent Origination' in its Incipient Stage." In *Buddhist Studies in Honor of Walpola Rahula*, edited by S. Balasooriya, et. al, 165 72. London: Gordon Fraser; Sri Lanka: Vimamsa.

(1980) 1989. *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Norman, K. R. 1982. "The Four Noble Truths: A Problem of Pāli Syntax." In *Indological and Buddhist Studies: Volume in Honour of Professor J. W. de Jong on his Sixtieth Birthday*, edited by L. A. Hercus, F. B. J. Kuiper, T. Rajapatirana, and E. R. Skrzypczak. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 377 91.

1983. *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hinayāna Schools of Buddhism*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz.

1989. "The Pāli Language and Scriptures." In *The Buddhist Heritage: Papers Delivered at the Symposium of the Same Name Convened at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, November 1985*, edited by T. Skorupski, 29 53. Tring, UK: The Institute of Buddhist Studies.

1993. "Mistaken Ideas about Nibbāna." *The Buddhist Forum* 3: 48 51.

1997. *A Philological Approach to Buddhism, the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai Lectures 1994*. London: The School of Oriental and African Studies.

Nyanaponika, Thera. 1959. *Anatta and Nibbana: Egolessness and Deliverance*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

1962. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, A Handbook of Mental Training Based on the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser.

(1949) 1998. *Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Nyanatiloka, Mahāthera. 1971. *A Guide through the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka: Being a Synopsis of the Philosophical Collection Belonging to the Buddhist Pali Canon, Followed by an Essay on the Paṭiccasamuppāda*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Oetke, C. 1988. *"Ich" und Das Ich: Analytische Untersuchungen zur Buddhistisch-Brahmanischen Ātmankontroverse*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner VerlagWiesbaden GmbH.

Oldenberg, H. (1882) 1998. *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*. Delhi: Pilgrims Book.

Oldenzki, A. 2011. "The Construction of Mindfulness." *Contemporary Buddhism* 12: 55 70.

Olivelle, P., trans. 1996. *Upaniṣads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Payutto, Phra P. 1995. *Buddhadhamma: Natural Laws and Values for Life*. New York: SUNY Press.

Peréz remón, J. 1980. *Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Piyadassi, Thera. 1959. *Dependent Origination: Paṭicca Samuppāda*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Prebish, C. 1974. "A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils." *Journal of Asian Studies* 33 (2): 239 54.

Rahula, W. (1959) 1974. *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press.

Reynolds, F. E., and Hallisey, C. 1987. "Buddha." In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 2, edited by M. Eliade, 319 32. New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan.

Rhys Davids, Mrs. (1928) 1978. *Sakya or Buddhist Origins*. New Delhi: Munishram Manoharlal.

Rhys Davids, T. W., and W. Stede. 1975. *The Pali-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint.

Robinson, R. H. 1972. "Some Methodological Approaches to the Unexplained Points." *Philosophy East & West* 22 (3): 309 23.

1970. *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson.

Robinson, R. H., and Johnson, W. L. 1997. *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*. 4th ed. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Ronkin, N. 2005. *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Salomon, R. 1997. "A Preliminary Survey of Some Early Buddhist Manuscripts Recently Acquired by the British Library." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117: 353 59.

1999. *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra*. Seattle: Washington University Press.

2001. "'Gāndhārī Hybrid Sanskrit': New Sources for the Study of the Sanskritization of Buddhist Literature." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 44: 241 52.

2003. "The Senior Manuscripts: Another Collection of Gandhāran Buddhist Scrolls." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (1): 73.

Samuel, G. 2008. *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*. Noida, India: Cambridge University Press.

Sayadaw, Mahasi. 1990. *Satipatthāna Vipassanā: Insight through Mindfulness*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Schober, J., ed. 1997. *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Schopen, G. 1997. *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

2007. "The Learned Monk as a Comic Figure: On Reading a Buddhist Vinaya as Indian Literature." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35: 201 26.

Schmithausen, L. 1973. "Spirituelle Praxis und Philosophische Theorie im Buddhismus." *Zeithschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenshcaft*. Heft 3 (73): 161 86.

1976. "On the Problem of the Relation of Spiritual Practice and Philosophical Theory in Buddhism." In *German Scholars on India*, edited by Cultural Department of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 235 50. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office.

1981. "On Some Aspects or Theories of 'Liberating Insight' and 'Enlightenment' in Early Buddhism," in *Studien zun Jainismus und Buddhismus: Gendenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorg*, edited by K. Bruhn and A. Wezler, 199 250. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH.

1990. "Preface." In *Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference,* Vol. II: *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, edited by D. S. Ruegg and L. Schmithausen, L., 1 4. Leiden, New York, KØbenhavn, Köln: E. J. Brill.

1992. "An Attempt to Estimate the Distance in Time between Aśoka and the Buddha in Terms of Doctrinal History." In *The Dating of the Historical Buddha, Part 2*, edited by H. Bechert, H., 110 47. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

1997. "The Early Buddhist Traditions and Ecological Ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4: 1 74.

2000. "Zur Zwölfgliedrigen Formel des Entsehens in Abhängigkeit." *Hōrin: Vergleichende Studien zur Japanischen Kultur* 7: 41 76.

Sharf, R. H. 1995. "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience." *Numen* 42: 228 83.

2000. "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7 (11 12): 267 87.

Shulman, D. 2001. *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shulman, E. 2008. "Early Meanings of Dependent origination." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36: 297 317.

2008a. "Nāgārjuna on Impermanence, the Buddha on Illusion." In *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India*, edited by D. Shulman and S. Weil, 168 87. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

(2007) 2009. "Creative Ignorance: Nāgārjuna on the Ontological Significance of Consciousness." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 30 (1 2): 139 73.

2010. "Mindful Wisdom: The Sati paṭṭhāna sutta on Mindfulness, Memory and Liberation." *History of Religions* 49 (4): 393 420.

Forthcoming. "Early Buddhist Imagination: The Aṭṭhakavagga as Buddhist Poetry." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*.

Siderits, M. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy, An Introduction*. Great Britain: Ashgate; Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.

Skilling, P. 2009. "Redaction, Recitation, and Writing: Transmission of the Buddha's teaching in India in the Early Period." In *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, edited by S. C. Berkwitz, J. Schober, and C. Brown. London: Routledge, 53 75.

Smith, B. K. 1989. *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Soma, Thera. *Satipatthana Sutta: The Discourse on the Arousing of Mindfulness*. http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.soma.html. Last accessed April 2, 2012.

Stcherbatskey, T. (1922) 2005. *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma."* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Stuart Fox, M. 1989. "Jhāna and Buddhist Scholasticism." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12 (2): 79 109.

Sujato, Bhikkhu. 2006. *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. http://rapidlibrary.com/download file i.php? file=31849474&desc=Ajahn±Sujato±A±History±of±Mindfulness±.pdf. Last accessed June 6, 2011.

Swearer, D. K. 1973. "Control and Freedom: The Structure of Buddhist Meditation in the Pāli Suttas." *Philosophy East & West* 23 (4): 435 55.

1973a. *A Guide to the Perplexed: The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Varma, V. P. 1971. *Early Buddhism and its Origins*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Vetter, T. 1988. *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

1990. "Some Remarks on Older Parts of the Suttanipāta." In *Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference.* Vol.II: *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, edited by D. S. Ruegg and L. Schmithausen, 36 56. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Vipassana Research Institute. *The Pāḷi Tipiṭaka*. http://www.tipitaka.org.

Vose, K. A. 2009. *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Walsche, M., trans. 1995. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Wayman, A. 1971. "Buddhist Dependent Origination." *History of Religions* 10: 185 203.

1980. "Dependent Origination The Indo Tibetan Tradition." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 7: 275 300.

Wezler, A. 1984. "On the Quadruple Division of the Yogaśāstra, the Caturvyūhatva of the Cikitsāśāstra and the 'Four Noble Truths' of the Buddha." *Indologica Taurinensia* 12: 289 337.

Williams, D. 1974. "The Translation and Interpretation of the Twelve Terms in the Paṭiccasamuppāda." *Numen* 21: 35 63.

Williams, P. 1989. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. New York: Routledge.

Wynne, A. 2004. "The Oral Transmission of Early Buddhist Literature." *Journal of the International Assocaition of Buddhist Studies* 27 (1): 97 127.

2005. "The Historical Authenticity of Early Buddhist Literature, A Critical Evaluation." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* 49: 35 70.

2007. *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Routledge.

Yamada, I. 1980. "Premises and Implications of Interdependence." In *Buddhist Studies in Honor of Walpola Rahula*, edited by S. Balasooriya, et. al., 267 93. London: Gordon Fraser; Sri Lanka: Vimamsa.

Index